BIRTHS,

DEATHS, AND MARRIAGES.



VOL. III.

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BIRTHS,

DEATHS, AND MARRIAGES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SAYINGS & DOINGS;" "MAXWELL;" "JACK BRAG;"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1839.

BIRTHS, DEATHS,

AND

MARRIAGES.

CHAPTER I.

Things seem to go crossly at Sadgrove. It appeared that one permanent and, as it were, constitutional feeling, wholly occupied the mind of Mortimer; and that anything,—no matter what,—which irritated or provoked him, acted immediately upon that one feeling. The first thing that had worried him during the day was, the sudden fit of the attorney; the second, Magnus's acceptance of his proffered aid: the rest was made up of little contradictions on the part of Helen, and two or three domestic disagreements with tenants and servants, all tending to keep his bile in motion; and when

he saw, at the close of his day of worries, the reception his wife gave Francis Blocksford, the train was fired, and we have been told the result.

Now, if the reader should have become in any degree interested in this narrative, it is but natural to suppose that he might wish to hear how the attorney got through his gout; how long he stayed at Sadgrove; how Mortimer endured the society of Frank Blocksford for the next two days; when Jack Batley and his bride came to Sadgrove; and when the St. Almes went to France; together with sundry other results of foregone beginnings, "with many things of worthy memory which now shall die in oblivion, and," as Grumio sayeth, "he return unexperienced to his grave."

In the conduct of my story, the reader will please to observe, that at this moment two years and a-half have elapsed since the day of Mr. Brimmer Brassey's attack of the gout: —two years and a-half and more have flown during the interval between his laying down my second volume and opening my third, and

that therefore, instead of dwelling upon events and occurrences which this *hiatus* renders comparatively remote, he must be prepared to find himself — at Sadgrove, it is true — its inmates being under very different circumstances from those in which he last saw them,— placed in different positions, — fulfilling new duties, and exerting and obeying new influences.

I have already said, that it was my intention at some particular period of this history to let the characters of the drama speak for themselves. That period has arrived; and I know no better method of enlightening the reader as to what has occurred during the past two years and a-half, and the *now* actual state of affairs, "men and things," as regards the Mortimer family, than putting at his disposal the contents of the letter-box of Sadgrove Hall, as they were prepared for despatch on a particular day in the month of April, when a select party was assembled under its hospitable roof for the purpose of passing the Easter holidays.

Upon these authentic documents comment

is needless. A country-house is the world's epitome, as everybody knows. Here is the box: and as one who was loved living and is lamented dead, was wont to say, "the thing speaks for itself."

It may perhaps be necessary to enumerate the persons from whose pens the position of affairs is to be judged. The party consisted of, besides Mortimer and Helen, Mr. Francis Blocksford, Lord Harry Martingale, a regular periodical visiter; Lady Mary, as before; old Lady Bembridge and her niece, (still Miss Rouncivall;) Captain Harvie, Mr. Pash, a millionaire and *gourmand determiné;* and, professionally, for two days, again, Mr. Brimmer Brassey,—a circumstance worthy of remark as indicative of the gradual influence attainable on the score of business by such personages.

The under-plot, as it may be considered,—that is to say, the correspondence of the second table, was carried on by Miss Mitcham, Mrs. Mortimer's maid; Mr. Swing, Lord Harry's man; Mr. Fisher, the cook; Wilkins, Mor-

timer's most trusty right-hand adviser; and sundry other persons in the "domestic" line.

Having thus presented the characters, open we the box, taking the letters promiscuously as they come.

No. I.

FROM MRS. MORTIMER TO JOHN BATLEY, ESQ. GROSVENOR STREET.

"My dear Father, Sadgrove, April 3, 18—.

"I am not satisfied with the accounts you give of your health, nor do I think Teresa herself is at her ease about you. It is all perfectly right and just, and, as we know, quite according with the customs of society, to submit to the advice of a physician of eminence without suggesting the propriety or necessity of calling in any other assistance; but if you really have not an unbounded confidence, or entertain any question as to the accuracy of his view of your complaint, all such punctilios should be overlooked. I really do wish — if

I were where I was three years and a-half ago I think I should succeed in enforcing the wish — that you would send for somebody else, — of course, not without mentioning your intention to Dr. Z. : — nothing would be in worse taste than to attempt concealment from him of your proceeding, not to speak of the duplicity which it would involve. Let us do whatever we may consider just, or even best, for ourselves, but let it be done openly and fairly : disguises and contrivances and deceptions I cannot endure ; and certain I am, if he be the sort of person I have always heard him represented, considering the place he holds in his profession, that he will feel no illiberal jealousy if you suggest calling in additional advice. Do, dearest father, for my sake, — for Teresa's sake, — for your own sake, (and I put that last, because I am sure you care more for me and Teresa than for yourself,) —do what I ask.

" You may easily imagine with such unsatisfactory accounts from you, how irksome and painful the effort to be gay here is. I am

dreadfully worried by my visiters, who, for the most part, are not altogether after my own heart: Lady Bembridge does not improve with age, and her niece is anything but agreeable, at least in my opinion: what I think of Lady Mary you already know; but as she and Lord Harry are not only old friends of Mortimer's but of each other, they are to be looked for here as regularly as the recurring seasons.

"Mr. Pash, a new ally of Mortimer's, — for what particular merit or virtue I have not been able to discover, — is intolerably vulgar, talks loud, and laughs loud at what he himself has said. He passes one-half of his time in descanting upon cookery, and the other half in eating the 'delicacies' upon which he has previously lectured; one of his favourite morning strolls being to the kitchen to enquire of Mr. Fisher, our cook, how the *carte* is to be varied for the day, and even to instruct him in the construction of certain peculiar dishes, his principal delight and boast being, that he has given his name in Ude's book to some 'Sauce à-la-

Pash,' which has been pronounced *impayable* even in Arlington Street.

"There are degrees and gradations in everything, and Mr. Pash is preserved from my denunciation as the most odious person I ever saw, by the unexpected presence, — for but a short time, I trust,—of Mr. Brassey, my uncle's attorney: of course, I have no right to say one word to Mortimer upon matters with which I can have nothing to do, and about which he must know so much more than I can; but there is something about Mr. Brassey, totally apart from his assurance and vulgarity, which makes me dread his presence. Knowing, as we do, the implicit reliance that my uncle Jacob has upon him, and knowing how implacable his hatred for Mortimer is, I cannot disconnect in my mind the object of his visits here with some plan to annoy or embarrass my husband; for I know so much as to be convinced, that while Mr. Brassey is occupied with Mortimer about Colonel Magnus's affairs, he is playing some under-game with my uncle.

He never mentions his name; but every now and then I see an expression of confident and triumphant satisfaction lighting up his impudent countenance, which conveys a meaning to my mind that he feels conscious he is somehow or in some way carrying his point in deceiving Mortimer, and is anxious to make me understand that *I* am a person for whom he has a very high regard.

"As for Mortimer, every year seems to draw him farther from me — I mean with respect to that which I have all along so earnestly desired, — a confidential reliance upon me, — a singleness of thought, and purpose, and intention. My whole life is spent in endeavouring to secure the wished-for certainty that I am trusted and beloved. I deserve that reliance: — but no — let what may happen, I am never told of it until some third person informs me. The advertisement in the newspapers of the sale of an estate which Mortimer parted with last year, was the first announcement to me of his intention to dispose of it: upon the smallest

as well as most important family arrangements, except those purely personal, I am never consulted.—Why this is, I know not.

"I had hoped that this reserve, which is growing almost into coldness, would have given place to some more congenial feeling after his recovery from his long and dangerous illness: for seven weeks I never quitted his bed-side, except when at intervals he got a little sleep. I watched him by day and night, and prayed for him as he slept. I hoped to prove to him how truly, how devotedly I loved him; and when, by Heaven's goodness, he recovered, all I longed for, was, that confidence which I feel I never yet have succeeded in obtaining. Do not, my dear father, think that I mean to trouble you with my grievances, at a time when you should be kept quiet: it is no new theme. All I desire in the world is to be trusted:—I am not;—I feel myself therefore degraded.

"Under this affliction, for I call it nothing less, Providence has sent me consolation and support,—my two dear children are the constant

objects of my care and attention. Francis is growing fast, and like his father, who really seems fond of him. I know men dislike the worry of infants, and sometimes even affect a dislike of them in order to avoid the ridicule of worldly friends, who take pleasure in laughing down the best feelings of our nature. The dear child almost begins to talk, and is one of the most engaging babies, as Teresa says, that ever lived. Rosa is yet too young to give me the slightest idea of what she will turn out; but they are to me treasures dearer than my life: and yet, I think, Mortimer is not pleased that I am so much in my nursery. Oh! that I could but discover the means of engaging his mind,—of securing his sympathy! But I will not complain; the day *may* come; and I am resolved not even to murmur, except to you, my dearest father. I will do my duty rigidly and righteously, and I know, — I am sure, in time, I shall triumph over the discontent and apathy which now seem to triumph over *him*.

"Tell Teresa that my new maid Mitcham answers extremely well: she is so extremely lady-

like in her manner, that I feel scarcely able to consider her as a mere servant. She has been educated,— too well, I should say, for her present station in life; but, to be sure, as the unexpected bankruptcy and death of her father are the causes of her being thrown upon the world, no blame can attach to those who, in her earlier and better days, afforded her the ordinary advantages of girls in her own sphere. I did not know the family was so large, — three sons and four other daughters. I feel extremely interested about her: she tells me her sisters are much better-looking than herself; of course, I did not express any opinion as to their relative merits that way, but I doubt very much whether anything as regards expression of countenance can exceed her own. You must not suppose, my dear father, that I am so dazzled with beauty, in either man or woman, as not to see the failings of its possessor; but, as I think Mitcham's good looks might have exposed her to danger and difficulty in the world, I rejoice to have had the opportunity of giving

her a respectable situation and a comfortable home.

"Francis Blocksford is here, agreeable and gay as usual: his pencil is in constant requisition in the morning, and his guitar in the evening. He is really a charming person, and so I believe Miss Rouncivall thinks; but she is considerably his senior, and has no fortune, which I fancy will not particularly suit the St. Almes; and, moreover, I suspect that Francis has left his heart in France. I had a long letter from his mother the other day, and not one word of coming over to England.

"You ask me if I have heard anything lately of Mrs. Farnham. Alas! no. I fancy the correspondence between her and Mortimer has ceased altogether: the report you have heard of her arrival in England may be true, for her name is never mentioned here. I wish she *would* return to her native country; it might perhaps lead to a reconciliation between her and her brother. His disinclination from her

is another instance of his sensitiveness upon the subject of his early life. Oh! if I could but teach him how much better it would be to assure himself of the efficacy of repentance, and a resolution to be good for the future:—but no!

"My dearest father, I have written a volume; Lord Harry's frank, however, will hold it all; and if my 'weighing machine' did not indicate that it is time I should conclude, I could still go on,—for with whom can I converse as I can with you?—(and this *is* conversation)—in whom can I confide? I will not ask the question, it brings me back to the one painful subject by which I am afflicted and worn down. If it were not for my darling children, I do think I should sink under it; but as it is, Mortimer and I are the civilest couple in the world before company; nay, he allows me to rally him, and joke about him, and looks contented, and even pleased; and I believe I have therefore established a reputation as a wife dominant. Ah! father, how truly do I now illustrate in my own case all the theories I used to

hold about worldly comforts and worldly appearances. My mind is constituted for happiness. I am ardent and enthusiastic, I know; and that ardour, and that enthusiasm, would secure the happiness I seek, and even think, I could confer; but energies are damped; the anxiety to please is mortified, and the warmth of affection is chilled when we are conscious that our feelings are *not* reciprocated. Still, father, — dearest, best of fathers! — fear not for your child: she gave her heart to the man she loved, and no disappointment of her early hopes shall wean her from that love, or draw her from her duty.

"Write to me, and tell me you have done as I desire. If I do not hear by return of post, I shall write to Teresa, to whom, dearest father, give my best of loves; and believe me

"Your affectionate and devoted child,

"HELEN MORTIMER."

No. II.

FROM CHARLES CALLEY PASH, ESQ. TO LORD RUMFORD.

"My dear Lord, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"I was extremely glad to get your letter: —I shall make a point of being there. I have been here now nine days, and a change of pasture is becoming necessary. This is to me an extremely dull place. I see no beauty in country excursions, and the people here seem to me to be all out of sorts. Mortimer himself is mortal dull, and stalks up and down the room in the evening, scowling about, and looking very like his grandfather's picture just stepped from its frame.

"His cook, upon whom he rather piques himself, is a failure, — a monotonous mountebank, who has not a spark of genius in his whole composition. I have taken pains with the man personally, and have really obtained for the society here a little hitherto unknown

variety. I do not think Mortimer cares much about it: the man's name is Fisher, and he is an Englishman.

"Old Lady Bembridge is here, cheating at cards, and making herself as great a fool as ever; and her niece, whose case is growing desperate, is making *beaux yeux* all day long at a Mr. Blocksford, who seems to be quite at his ease in the family:—not so his host, who appears to me to watch the young gentleman about, with a most sensitive anxiety. I never saw anybody so gone off as the lady of the house must be. She is amiable, and pleasing, and all that, but nothing like what you taught me to expect from your description of her before her marriage: she seems very much addicted to her children, so until dinner we see but little of her.

"Lady Mary Sanderstead is as gay as usual, and quite as full of gossip and scandal as ever. How lucky it is for the peace and comfort of society that there is no such place as a Palace of Truth in England: to hear her talk

of other people, and see her talk *to* Lord Harry, is as amusing a *spectacle* as one can well find in a country-house.

"I do not know if you recollect our seeing an attorney at Epsom races in a particularly awkward scrape with some of the 'legs,' and something closely resembling a horsewhipping being the result: *he* is here, evidently doing a little dirty work for somebody. I certainly was a good deal surprised at his appearance at table the day before yesterday; however, I find that he is professionally occupied, and that he goes the day after to-morrow: he was condescending enough to invite me to the billiard-table, but a violent rheumatism, which I never had in the whole course of my existence, prevented my accepting the gentleman's challenge.

"Taken altogether, I think this is one of the very worst arranged houses I ever yet have been sent to,—for so I consider myself to have been; but it is always the case where the master has no turn for living, and is nearly as careless of the cellar as of the *cuisine*. In combination

this sort of thing is terrible. If I stayed here another week, I should be starved without even being able to adopt the woodcock system, of living upon suction. I have no faith in Fisher, and very little confidence in the *phisique.*

" You told me that I should be delighted with the beauties of a fishing-temple in a romantic glade on the banks of the Severn, and lured me into an anticipated liking of the place by describing the gaiety of the parties made to visit it. Deceiving man !—deluding friend ! After two or three dull mornings, diversified, as I have already said, by discoursing Mr. Fisher on the shape of his *croquets,* the colour of his cutlets, and the consistency of his Macedoine, not to speak of instructing him in the *fabrique* of the *Sauce à-la-Pash,* I made enquiries about this Elysian bower, when my gloomy host informed me that it was pulled down about two years since, and the gardens surrounding it ploughed up for the benefit of the agriculturist. I am afraid there is some history attached to its demolition, by the way in which one or two of the *enfans de la mai-*

son looked at each other when I asked the question.

"As to the negotiation about the property I talked to you of, it will never proceed farther: the place is altogether too small. However, I am equally obliged to you, and if things had been in better order here, I should have been very much obliged to your friend Mr. Mortimer; as it is, however, there is a great deal of pleasure to be enjoyed by my visit, entirely derivable, however, from the certainty of getting away in eight-and-forty hours from the present writing.

"I must tell you one smart thing which the little attorney sported yesterday after dinner. Lady Bembridge, who was sitting opposite to him, looking at him as she would at a toad, or as the King of the Brobdignagians may be supposed to have looked at Gulliver, anxious either to satisfy herself, or, more properly, to mortify *him*, asked him if his grandfather did not once live at some place, I forget where, in Devonshire, and if he were alive or dead.

"'My lady,' said Mr. Brassey, 'I really cannot answer your ladyship's question accurately. I remember hearing that my grandfather disappeared many years since, just about the time of the county assizes, and I never made any farther enquiries upon the subject.'

"Lady Bembridge, who is perfectly matter-of-fact, believed the story, which may probably be true enough. If it be, the way in which it was told, does infinite credit to Mr. Brassey's imperturbability; and if not, reflects considerable honour upon his imaginativeness.

"At half-past seven on Saturday, then, we meet; till when, believe me, my dear Rumford,

"Your faithful and sincere

"C. Pash."

From these two letters the reader will already begin to perceive the actual state of affairs, and indeed of affairs gone by. The more of the correspondence he sees, the better he will be able to ascertain the value of worldly friendships, and the probability of eventual happiness for Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer.

No. III.

FROM MISS ROUNCIVALL TO MISS GROVER.

"Dear Fanny, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"I long since hoped to have heard from you, but I suppose you have been very busy in preparing for your foreign excursion. I wish I could persuade my aunt into a similar expedition; but I believe so long as she can get her *ecarté* or whist, she thinks very little about the surrounding scenery, or cares for any change except that which she gets for her counters.

"This is a delightful place: nothing can be more lovely than the situation; and I, who really like the country in the season at which it looks greenest and prettiest, feel myself in a sort of paradise.

"We have a small party here. Lady Mary Sanderstead you know; she is here, and, of course, Lord Harry,—and a Captain Harvie. A little lawyer who is my aunt's aversion; and a monster of a man of the name of Pash; he is, I

believe, what they call an 'East-India Director,' whatever that is: but where he comes from, I have no idea; that he is going on Saturday is a fact by far more important to my comfort.

"Mrs. Mortimer is extremely agreeable and kind, but so changed from what she was, that I scarcely should have known her: it is nearly ten months since I last saw her, and so great an alteration in so short a time I could hardly have imagined possible. I think she worries herself too much about her children: they are nice little things enough, but when children *are* so little I feel no great interest in them. I suppose it is necessary that all men and women should begin the world in that small way; but to *me*, till it can talk and walk, a child is almost a nuisance.

"Mrs. Mortimer, however, devotes herself to her nursery, and, I think, Mr. Mortimer feels rather vexed that she does. She does not take a sufficiently active share in making up our little morning parties; indeed, she scarcely shows herself, except at breakfast and luncheon, until dinner. You have no idea how

pleasant Lady Mary can make herself in a small, quiet circle like this. She is full of fun and anecdote; and being some four or five years my senior, I gather traditional jokes from her against my contemporaries which are extremely amusing.

"Pray, tell me, dear Fanny, have you ever heard more about the '*aimable Henri?*' I know exactly what you will say, — and that you will either laugh at my question, or be angry: but, seriously speaking, I think him most particularly agreeable, — not, my dear girl, to your prejudice, for I dare say he would not deign to cast his diamond eyes at such a being as Miss Rouncivall: nevertheless, do tell me. A little sincerity is a very charming *cadeau;* and all I pique myself upon, is the possession of a large stock of that commodity.

"I told you, some two years or more since, that I acted bridesmaid, by aunt's desire, to the widow-bride of Mrs. Mortimer's father. It was, as I mentioned, altogether a most ridiculous affair: the absurd affectation of the lady, who was the widow of some city shopkeeper; and

the still more absurd, affected juvenility of the bridegroom, never have left my recollection. The poor dear bridegroom of that day is, however, dangerously ill, which, of course, adds to Mrs. Mortimer's dulness. Oh! Fanny, if the option were offered me to die, or marry Mr. Mortimer, supposing he had not married before, I think I should prefer death, and a decent funeral, to such a union.

" Now, you will ask me, why?—he is handsome, — agreeable, — accomplished, — and although, perhaps, (because between you and me there cannot be many secrets as to age,) twenty years my — may I say *our* — senior, he is in society most charming and most fascinating, still there is something about him—I cannot explain it—but this is entirely *entre nous*—which is odious. He seems to me as if Old Nick had some serious claims upon him; and that while his bright eyes are sparkling, and a sweet smile is playing over his features, there is something beyond our ken, which holds him, if not to another world, at least to some other train of thoughts and feelings. Mark my words,—Mrs.

Mortimer is not happy. She does everything she can to make us believe she is the most fortunate and most entirely delighted wife in the world, but I am sure it is not so. Aunt Bembridge has never said anything upon the subject; but from some of her hints and inferences, I am certain she is quite of my opinion.

"Mrs. Mortimer appears to me to be as much changed in mind as in person since I first knew her. She is now so very good, that she even goes the length of repressing any joke at the expense of her absent friends, which amounts almost to the absurd: still, as I have already said, she is all kindness to her guests. There is none of that off-hand smartness, — that sort of character-sketching, in which she used to excel, and which, to say truth, made her so many enemies. One thing, I think, she has done, which is injudicious; she has brought into the house, in the capacity of her own maid, — who is to grow into a nursery governess when young Francis, and his still younger sister, Rosa, — for so are the babies named, require the office of such a servant, — one of the

prettiest young women I ever saw: it seems she is the daughter of respectable parents, who have met with some reverses of fortune, and Helen has therefore become deeply interested in her fate, and is determined to patronize her. I do not think this wise: the young woman appears all diffidence and submission, but I should say—*why*, I shall *not* say—that I think her far too engaging for her situation; and I very much doubt whether her mistress will not repent of her kindness: however, I may be wrong; and, besides, one ought not to be uncharitable: if we were to give way to all our fancies and suspicions, we should lose half the pleasure of life, which is derived from doing good.

"Let me beg you, my dear Fanny, to write to me: you would not, I am sure, think of leaving England without bidding me good-b'ye in a long, long letter. The Dartnells have taken a house at Exmouth for the whole summer: poor dear Mrs. Dartnell, who is really a kind-hearted woman, has done this because she thinks it will be good for Caroline's health,

and because dear good Dr. James Johnson has advised it. Caroline writes me word that she detests the scheme, and that all her anxiety was to remain in town till the end of August, but that she dare not rebel against her mother's orders; especially as George Walford will be quartered at Hounslow, and she knows that her mother would attribute her unwillingness to leave London to her anxiety for a chance of seeing him after his final banishment from the house. Mrs. Dartnell is very shortsighted, but thinks herself prodigiously wise, and honours me with her confidence and correspondence, in which latter she entreats me to exert the influence she knows I possess over Caroline to make her in love with this design of Devonshire rustication, which, of course, I have promised to do; but which, as I am sure the attempt would be useless, and, if not, would make me very unpopular with Caroline, I certainly shall not try, — for Caroline, although a dear amiable creature, has a temper and a tongue, neither of which, with all my sincere regard for her, I have any desire to rouse into action.

"Young Mr. Walton has proposed to Louisa Barton, who, to the astonishment of 'a numerous circle of friends,' has refused him. She wrote me the whole history, and it really was so absurd, that I could not help reading a part of her letter to Lady Mary, who was exceedingly amused by the enumeration of the reasons which led her to the unexpected conclusion. *I* cannot understand it; he is agreeable, with money, — and although not an Adonis, like '*Henri*,' still is quite good-looking enough; and she, plain, not very young, (seven years our senior,) not rich, nor anything else very fascinating, kills his hopes, and discards him. I ought to be extremely obliged to her for detailing all her reasons for so doing, — not that I at all needed the confession: however, I wrote her a letter full of approbation of what she had done; for, although I think it exceedingly foolish, and am quite sure she will regret it hereafter, there could be no necessity for my making myself disagreeable to her by finding fault with a measure which was irrevocable.

"I have no other news for you, nor room

to say anything more but that I remain, my dear Fanny,

"Yours affectionately and sincerely,

"J. R."

"P. S. — I forgot to tell you that we have here Mr. Blocksford, a son of that odious Countess St. Alme by her former husband. He is exceedingly handsome, and highly accomplished: he is very young, and I should say giddy; but his singing to the accompaniment of his own guitar is very charming: he draws beautifully, and is an unequalled pattern of good-nature. It might sound vain to you, dear Fanny, to say that I think I am his favourite of the party; but it is not of my seeking. Mr. Mortimer appears to be extremely attached to him,—I suppose, for 'his mother's sake.' However, thank our stars! she is not here. Young Blocksford treats Helen Mortimer as if she were his sister; and her husband treats him as if he were his son. People do say strange things, but I never listen to tittle-tattle, — only he certainly *is* very like our elegant host, and his name is Francis: but

then he is Mortimer's godson, and 'that accounts for it.' I think, if you saw him, you would say that he rather transcends the '*aimable Henri*' in looks; only you know that, to me, personal appearance in a man is but a secondary consideration: Francis Blocksford, however, *is* very handsome. When you write, tell me if you have ever seen him. Adieu! dear Fanny, once more."

As these letters are given exactly as they turn up in the box, it may appear a by no means unhappy coincidence that the very next which comes to hand is one from this "Adonis of the woods," Mr. Blocksford himself, addressed to his most intimate friend Robert Gram, from whom he had no secrets, and to whom the reader will perceive he communicates all the outpourings of his young and love-fraught heart. It does not present at all an unacceptable *pendant* to the epistle of Miss Rouncivall; for, if not equal to it in worldly knowledge, it is at least its superior in sincerity.

No. IV.

FROM FRANCIS BLOCKSFORD, ESQ. TO ROBERT GRAM, ESQ., C.C. OXFORD.

"My dear Gram, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"I am either the most fortunate or most miserable of created mortals. During all my former periodical visits to this place, I have been quite charmed with the urbanity of my host, who, as an old friend of my mother's, has put me quite *à mon aise*, and has indeed given me a more unlimited control over the establishment than I feel I have any right to; and as to his charming Helen, who really seems to me the *beau idéal* of a perfect wife, I never in my existence — not, to be sure, a very long one, — have seen a woman who appeared to me to blend all manner of kindness and good-humour with prudence and amiability in so delightful a manner.

"I have now known her for three years, and, of course, in the earlier part of our acquaintance she treated me as a big boy growing

into manhood, and seemed rather to encourage the transition from the chrysalism of what you call in England 'hobbledehoyism,' by a sort of sisterly feeling which I duly appreciated. Dear soul! nothing can be better or more delightful than she is, and you know how much I appreciate her goodness and that of Mortimer.

"The party here is this year, at least to *me*, flat,—accustomed as a boy to the gaiety of Paris, and not in the least understanding in France what the society of a country-house meant, inasmuch as we have no such comprehension. I have been enraptured with the *réunions* at Sadgrove; but, this year, I declare it is melancholy. There is a Miss Rouncivall, a sort of well-preserved old beauty, about thirty, who is, I honestly confess, oppressively good-natured to me: she makes me draw everything upon the face of the earth or the waters for her in the morning; she forces me to walk about with her in the gardens, to ride with her in the park, and, in short, to do everything which decorum and her aunt permit. whilst I am un-

fortunately devoted to what some people may call a meaner, and many, a baser pursuit.

"My dear Gram, this dear friend of mine, Helen Mortimer, has, in the plenitude of her benevolence, taken into her establishment such a creature—come, no frowns, no moralizing,—as her maid; how long she will remain in that character I do not pretend to say: she is called Miss Mitcham. Now, just picture to yourself a creature with the most symmetrical imaginable figure, very little favoured by purchaseable in-and-outishness; with feet almost as small as our beautiful friend who shall be nameless; eyes the most brilliant, yet full of all sorts of expression; a mouth only just sufficiently opening, when it smiles, to show two rows of teeth, which to compare with pearls were an absurdity, inasmuch as the best pearls are not always the whitest; and an air and manner that would dazzle a duchess. I confess I never saw such a being.

"Hear me, Gram: this girl is well-born and well-bred; I suppose my excellent mother would cut my legs off if she thought I could

be so low and grovelling in my views as to feel a real and sincere passion for a person in such a position of life; but, upon my soul! I do believe that the girl is so far above her present state in mind and accomplishments, that Helen herself feels a difficulty in preserving their relative positions.

"This divine creature puzzles me; I can think of nothing else. I declare, if I could prevail upon her to quit a service — ay, Gram, service, for that is the word, — for which she never was designed, and is not fitted, I would risk the censure of the world, and my lady-mother into the bargain, and go the whole length of marrying her.

"Oh, Gram, Gram! she is so beautiful! — I wish to Heaven you could but see her! It sounds, of course, quite ridiculous, and I dare say you will think me mad, and that I had no business to notice such a person; and then I know what you will say in your answer, — 'Give her twenty guineas, and she will be very civil and good-natured.' No, no, Gram: I declare to you, whether I am mad, as I begin

to think I am, or whether I am not, I do not care, but I love her to distraction; — I do, I do: and yet, Gram, I would not that she should suffer *by* me or *for* me — no: — but I think nothing can turn me from this love, for it is my first, — my first real love.

"My dear friend,—my dear Gram,—I shall be one-and-twenty next week: see what a line of years are before me, if I marry this young, innocent creature, well educated! Helen says all that of her;—for, whenever I can get Helen out of her nursery, I take her to walk in the garden round the house, never letting her know my object, and accidentally, as it seems, or incidentally, as it may be, bring her to speak of Mary Mitcham. Whether she is at all aware of my admiration, — whether Mitcham, as they call her, has told her, (I am never sure of what these women do,) I don't know, but she seems to humour me in the conversation; and never do we part, after one of these *tête-à-têtes*, without my being the more assured, upon Helen's own showing, that this beautiful Mary Mitcham, — recollect, Gram, a

gentlewoman born, — would make an excellent wife.

" Am I romantic, Gram? — am I wild? I see nothing before me but paths strewed with flowers, — an Eden which only wants an Eve: I do think, indeed I do, that I have found her. Dear, blessed, sweet innocent! she knows nothing of the strength of my feelings. My dear Gram, I love her devotedly, — devoutly love her! Am I to blame? — can hearts be controlled?—all this is perhaps Fate. Darling — she is an angel!

" The party here is as usual, I suppose, agreeable; — but, as I tell you, to me it is all a blank. I taste nothing, see nothing, hear nothing, — my beautiful Mary is a servant! — think of that, Gram: she who can talk, and sing, as well as any of them, and looks ten thousand times better, is excluded as a servant! I am sick at heart! All my resource is, when I am unable to see her, — and I scarcely ever can, except in the nursery, where she is supreme, — is getting into the woods and throwing myself under the budding trees, and think-

ing of her: — but she knows of my love for her — yes, yes! —and does not kill my hopes! Now, Gram, I trust you will not show me up to Wilson or Ward, or Hall or Martyn :—raise a laugh at my expense, Gram, and it shall cost you dear!—but you won't,—I know you won't: you are my friend, — my true friend! You have told me stories of yourself; and, by Jove! if you betray me! — But if you could but see this creature,— this lady, for that is the proper term, — this beautiful lady! - you would at once agree with me in all I say.

"Dear me! how sickening is all the detail of what is here called comfort and gaiety!— and, oh! that Miss Rouncivall — how she pesters me! And then, poor Mary Mitcham! ten times handsomer, and twenty times cleverer, comes in sometimes with a shawl or a bonnet for Helen, while I am subserviently doing Miss Rouncivall's biddings: — and then the dinners, and the wineing, and all the rest of it; and the music, and the *ecarté* for Lady Bembridge, who patronizes me; and then the flirtation of Lady Mary Sanderstead and Lord Harry. I

wonder they are not tired of the same performance, which I recollect, night after night, ever since I first saw them. Some people say Lord Harry will marry her when old Sanderstead dies; but I should think, after a decided flirtation of twenty years, of the nature which everybody imagines theirs to have been, they may both seek variety with somebody else when the veteran drops off, unless indeed, as I hear, but cannot yet quite comprehend, that affection becomes habitual.

"I tell you who Mary Mitcham is something like, — that beautiful girl we saw at the ball at Cheltenham, only infinitely more delicate; her eyes are so much fuller of expression. And then, my dear Gram, to think that she is doomed to the enormities of the second table! Oh, Gram, I wish you could but see her! — and yet I would rather you should not — her figure is so exquisite. I don't like to say much to Helen about her, but — Oh, my dear Gram, I am mad! — I am, upon my honour and soul!

"I am not quite sure that Mortimer is alto-

gether insensible to her beauty, — but then he is devoted to Helen : besides, he is an old fellow now, more than forty ; and, of course, has given up all attempts at gallantry : but I have observed, when I praised Mary to him in our walks or rides, he snubbed me, — what I call nipped me in the bud. I shouldn't be surprised if the old fellow had cast a look that way himself: but all that is dissembling ; I am in earnest. I see Paradise — Paradise! — Heaven before me ; because, as our dearest poet tells us,

'Love is Heaven, and Heaven is Love.'

"My dear Gram, I have but one subject to write upon. If I could but get a lock of her hair!—but I cannot — how can I? Oh, she is so lovely! — really and truly there never was anything like it, — and so innocent! Tell me, — write to me, — advise me what I shall do: I care for nothing, — think of nothing but her: and what a delight it is to have a friend into whose bosom one may pour one's inmost thoughts and feelings!

"I cannot tell you how kind Helen, as I

always call her, is; she is all sweetness and good-nature, and so fond of her dear children: I suppose that is all right: and I hear the women call them fine children, and pretty children; but, as far as I am concerned, I am like the man in the book, — I forget what book, — who declared he never could see any difference in babies, they were invariably the same, all so soft, and so red, and so very like their fathers. Mary Mitcham, by the way, sings sweetly; — I heard her the day before yesterday; — oh! a thousand times better than Miss Rouncivall, who is cried up as a great *cantatrice.* I have made half-a-dozen sketches of Mary, but not one of them does her justice: Lawrence could not have done her justice. I say again, I wish you could see her, — and yet I would rather you should not; I should like nobody to see her but myself.

"Why, my dear Gram, —why would there be anything wrong or degrading in my marrying the only being upon earth who could make me happy? She is of a most respectable family: where there is respectability, misfortune

enhances the interest which beauty and innocence excite. Advise me, — tell me what you think; only do not kill the hopes I entertain. Bid me follow the dictates of my heart, and make this amiable creature my wife. A whole life will be well spent in endeavouring to secure her happiness. Oh, to madness do I love her! Write, my dear friend, write, and say you sympathize with me. What in this world could compensate for the loss of dear, dear Mary! I shall wait your answer with the deepest anxiety. Adieu! dear friend; only let me implore you to write.

"Yours always truly,

"FRANCIS BLOCKSFORD."

To this most ardent, earnest appeal from the young lover to his valued friend, succeeds an epistle from Mr. Swing, Lord Harry's man, to Mrs. Swing, his loving wife.

No. V.

FROM MR. SWING TO MRS. SWING.

"Dear Nancy,

"I had hoped to have got away from this long before, but my lord is still so deucedly constant to Lady Mary, that there is no parting them. To be sure, in an honourable, right-up, straightforward matter of marriage, that sort of thing is quite laudable and the like; and I am sure, Nancy, I never by no accident whatever repented of the day when we was made one, because I am never so happy as when circumstances permits us to be together; nevertheless, when there isn't what I call right principle and the Church service to bind two people to one another, I do not think it altogether right to see what, in course you know as well as I do, is going on. But I never says anything one way or the other; I 'm as close as wax; and as to my lord, why, if I do sometimes jig a little out of him, I take special care that he shall not be cheated by anybody else.

"He knows *that*, and he knows how careful I am of his reputation. Why, when that Mr. Wattle which writes the statistical — I don't mean statistical, — satirical novels, offered me three guineas to tell him some anecdotes about my lord, and where he went oftenest to dine, and when he slept at home, and when he went to the country, I refused the money point-blank slap-dash; not only because I wouldn't betray my lord, but, but because I despised the meanness of the cretur', to offer me such a disparaging sum. In course, I told my lord what I had done, and he instantly give me a ten-pound note, thus making out the old adder, that 'Honesty is the best policy;' and so, my dear Nancy, you may depend upon it, it is, whenever you can get most by it.

"It is quite wonderful to see how curious little folks are about great ones. There is a lawyer here amongst the company, — a Mr. Brassey; in course, he is only down for some job which he is to be paid for, but they let him sit at table, and all that, nevertheless, he is uncommon low in the trade; and as I was a-standing

just giving some directions about our carriage which was in the court-yard, up he comes, and begins: 'I suppose Lord Harry travels a good deal?' I give him a look!—(uncommon civil,) — said nothing that little Six-and-eight-pence could lay hold of — 'Yes, sir,' says I.

" 'Did you come down straight from Town?' says little Nickey.

" 'Don't recollect, sir,' says I, and walked right off. Up I goes to my lord, and I says, says I, 'My lord, in case that small gentleman with the sky-blue under-waistcoat, that sits down at the bottom of the table at dinner, should complain of my being impudent, I'll just mention the fact.' So I ups and tells him; and he laughed like anything, and said I was quite right.

"Why, bless your soul! Nancy, at that place, Chapel House, — I don't think much of the place itself, — while we were a-changing horses, the head waiter comes up to me, and says: 'How well your master is looking!'

" 'Yes,' says I, 'pretty well; and how are *you?*'

" 'I'm pretty well,' says the snob. 'But,' says he, 'what's your master's name? I have known him a long time up and down the road.'

" So I wasn't to be had in that way. What d'ye think I said in reply? 'What's his name?' said I. 'Why, I have only lived with him eight years, and I never took the liberty yet of asking him.' I wish you had seen Snob's face. No, no: there's nothing like caution; and I am sorry to see other people are not so particular as I am.

" Mr. Wilkins, Mr. Mortimer's right hand— not that I mean to say a word in disparagement of him, for he stands treat like a Trojan,— and he and Mr. Tapley, the upper butler, are really liberal fellows in regard of table and all those arrangements; but he leaks,—lets out things he ought to keep in. I don't believe he is treacherous, but his head isn't so strong as it ought to be; and although, in course, we confine ourselves to claret, after the port foundation is laid, I have heard him say strange things as to the unpleasant way in which Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer live. As for Miss Mitch-

am, Mrs. Mortimer's own maid, she looks as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth: but my notion is, that she and Wilkins are what you call hand in glove; and that she tells him all she can find out about her mistress, and that he tells all he hears from her to his master. Now, that would be all very well if he gets proper remuneration; but he should recollect that all that is quite in the *enter-nous* line, as they call it, and that he ought not to speak about such things to other people.

"Wilkins tells me,—only, in course, this goes no further, — that Mrs. Mortimer is over head and ears in love with a Mr. Blocksford, who is always staying here,—a nice, handsome-looking fellow, and as good-natured a chap as ever I saw, — and that Mortimer has told Wilkins to keep an eye upon him; which, if he has done, in course, Wilkins ought to keep to himself. And what makes Wilkins think there is a good deal of truth in this is, that Mr. Blocksford is always a-dangling after Mitcham, which is Mrs. Mortimer's maid, and always making some excuse to go and see the children, two

little babbies; which, you know, is not by any means likely, because at his time of life, babbies is not no manner of attraction. So I was rogueing Mitcham herself about the young dandy's civilities, and that he was in love with *her;* but the moment I spoke about it, out of the room he went, and never came down no more that night: and what with that, and her being constantly with Mrs. Mortimer, Wilkins thinks that something rather wrong is hatching. But, as I said to myself, if Mr. Mortimer really set his man to watch his wife, it was an action which I would scorn, for I think it more calculated to turn her wrong than keep her right; and, at all events, Wilkins ought not to tell tales out of school.

"We none of us like Miss Mitcham,—we call her 'my lady;' and although Miss Nettleship, which is Lady Bembridge's young lady, is as nice and agreeable a young person as ever trod shoe-leather, Miss Mitcham will not associate with her, nor with Lady Mary's maid, at which I do not so much wonder. But no: Miss Mitcham likes to read books; and she sings

songs, and loves to watch the babbies while they are asleep, and the mamma is away, which to me looks very much like being very fond of their papa; because, to a young woman at her time of life, I am quite sure our society, with conversation and cards, and a remarkable nice supper, with all the etceteras, must be more agreeable than seeing two little things like them snoozling in a cot, unless there was something in it.

"Now, Nancy, never you betray one word of what I am going to say:—my belief is, that there is more going on in this house than many people may think — (Wilkins never dropped the smallest hint of this,—that I must say) — but what I have taken into my head is, that Mr. Mortimer himself is taken with the pretty face of this Miss Mitcham, and so wishes, if he can, to catch out young Blocksford in something which may make a regular blow-up. Besides, it is quite surprising to see how fond everybody in this establishment is of babbies: never an evening comes but up goes Mr. Mortimer the moment wine is over,—and he drinks

scarcely any — and it isn't good, moreover, except some that Wilkins gets from Tapley for our table — however, up stairs he goes to look at the babbies, and then there is Miss Mitcham watching them. To be sure, there is Mrs. Horton, which is the nurse, and Sarah the nursery-maid; but still — in course I say nothing, — and then Mr. Mortimer kisses the babbies, and Miss Mitcham holds the candle; and then he comes down again, and goes into the drawing-room; and then Mrs. Mortimer, she goes up and kisses the babbies; and then Mr. Blocksford strolls into the billiard-room and knocks the balls about, and then out *he* goes up the stairs which lead to his room, and then, if he sees the door ajar, and Mrs. Mortimer is in the nursery, in *he* goes to look at the babbies. Something will come of it — that you may depend upon.

"We are tolerably comfortable. When I first came down we had muttons for our bedrooms, but I soon set that to rights; and neither Miss Nettleship nor Miss Frowst, Lady Mary's young lady, now ever thinks of

coming to dinner without having their hair properly dressed, and no caps. We have quadrilles in the evening, and do very well; only Miss Mitcham retires, and hopes that the fiddles won't wake the bàbbies: they are not within fifty yards of them,—but it is what she calls fine and affectionate. She is playing her game double deep, and, as Miss Nettleship says, if she can but find her out, woe betide her.

"I hope you got the trout safe. It is very early, and if I hadn't got them netted, you wouldn't have had them. Mr. Mortimer is very particular about his trout-streams; but we, who are not so rich, cannot wait till the fly is up, so we net them: also I have sent you some very fine lampreys, ready dressed. I don't think you would like them to eat, inasmuch as they taste very like pitch, therefore send them to Mr. Buffley, the glover, in return you know for what. The little pots of lamperns are a delightful relish, so keep *them.* I am on exceedingly good terms with our cook here, who is a remarkably nice fellow of the

name of Fisher, and will do anything for me: In fact, the lampreys I send were down in the *carte* for dinner to-day, but the moment I just insinuated my wish, out they went, and salmon took their place, which grows in the river at the bottom of the garden; lampreys, ditto; but it's all in the dressing. Never mind—let the glover have them.

"And so now, dearest Nancy, no more at present. I hope to be back in a week or ten days at farthest: I shall be exceedingly glad to get home. Remember me kindly to Bill and the rest: I hope they treat you well. And believe me yours most truly,

"JOHN SWING."

Every step we take towards the developement of affairs appears to entangle them the more; and so far from effecting the much-desired purpose of clearing away the difficulties with which the family of Mortimer seem to be surrounded and threatened, a combination of evils, misunderstandings, misconstructions, and misapprehensions arise around us.

We have yet one or two letters to open from more important personages of the drama, which may tend to enlighten us as to the *real* facts of the case, at which the subordinates can only, by circumstances, be permitted to guess. We must first, however, allow our friend, Lady Bembridge, to communicate, after her own fashion, some of her sentiments and opinions to the Dowager Duchess of Gosport, one of her oldest friends and greatest allies, and who was a sort of sister chaperon to Helen in other days. The reader, already familiar with her ladyship's style of conversation, must expect nothing more than hypothesis in her epistle to the Duchess.

No. V.

LETTER FROM THE COUNTESS OF BEMBRIDGE TO THE DUCHESS DOWAGER OF GOSPORT.

"MY DEAR DUCHESS, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"Whenever a person is sensible of friendly attentions and an earnest desire on the part of others to do them a kindness, it is impossible

to quit the scene of their hospitality and good nature without regret; and certainly, if ever anybody were justified in feeling grateful for courtesy and affection exhibited towards them in this house, I am that individual.

"When one sees a couple, who seem devoted to each other, domesticated in a beautiful retreat, in the enjoyment of every earthly comfort and luxury, it naturally occurs to the observer of human nature to enquire whether the happiness with which they are apparently blest is, in point of fact, genuine and entire. If an intimate acquaintance with the persons themselves, and a careful consideration of all the circumstances connected with their marriage, should lead one to entertain a doubt upon the subject, we grow naturally apprehensive that some day or other the calm in which they appear to exist, will break into a storm, the consequences of which may be the wreck of all their hopes and expectations.

"I would not, my dear Duchess, have you infer from anything I have said upon this point that I intend to apply my remarks to any par-

ticular case, for I have always observed, that if a person, however intimately connected with a family, venture to meddle in its affairs, or even offer suggestions, tending, as might be supposed, to secure its comfort and happiness, that person becomes involved in innumerable difficulties, and generally incurs the anger and indignation of both parties: all I mean to say is, that when once the idea of a possibility of such a state of circumstances has taken possession of the mind, it is extremely difficult to mingle in the domestic life of such a pair without an anxiety incompatible altogether with a perfect enjoyment of their society.

"Should it occur that the Winsburys are able to receive Harriet and myself next week, it seems probable that we shall leave this, on a visit to them; but where a family is extremely large, and its connexions exceedingly numerous, it is scarcely possible to be sure of a reception exactly at the time we are prepared to avail ourselves of a general invitation. At all events, if circumstances, quite unexpected at present, should not intervene, the visit which

Harriet and I have so long anticipated with pleasure will be made out, and we shall present ourselves at Hartsbury accordingly.

"Believe me, my dear Duchess,

"Yours most sincerely,

"E. BEMBRIDGE."

"Were Harriet at hand, she would, I am sure, desire me to add her best regards and affectionate remembrance."

The next female correspondent whose turn comes to be exhibited, is Lady Mary Sanderstead, from whom we have more than one letter.

No. VI.

FROM LADY MARY SANDERSTEAD TO LADY ALICIA BURTON.

Sadgrove Hall,
April 3, 18—.

"MY DEAR SISTER ALICE,

"Your letter afforded me a vast deal of amusement. Your description of your party at Rollesford is admirable; and I can quite imagine your enjoyment of all that has been

going on; not but that we *have* some things to amuse us even here.

"Poor dear Mrs. Mortimer, who evidently remains just as fond of her precious husband as ever, is absolutely in heroics if the slightest hint is thrown out as to his agreeable levities. She flatters herself that she has quite reformed him, and seems resolved not to have her eyes opened:—*ainsi soit il*, it is no affair of mine; and as I have enough of my own to look after, I give her up. She is exceedingly fond of her children,—not more so, probably, than I should have been of mine, if I had been blest, as they call it, with any; but I must say, to indifferent persons, it is rather tiresome: of course, if she chooses to hide herself in her nursery, that can be nothing to anybody else, if she would only take a little more pains to make things agreeable for her friends. I believe, after all, that the way she leaves us, entirely to ourselves, is best calculated for our amusement. We do just as we like,—order the horses and carriages when we please, without the slightest demur or interruption,—

for Mortimer is generally eclipsed all the morning, — shut up with a lawyer, — or else riding, or walking, or fishing with young Blocksford, to whom he appears to pay particular attention.

"I cannot quite make this out. *I* believe he is as jealous of him as ever middle-aged man was of young one; whether with reason or not, I do not pretend to say. The youth is in love — of that I am certain, and so is Mortimer; and my belief is, that he makes him the companion of his walks and rides, not so much, as Lord Harry thinks, in order to worm out his secret, as to keep him away from the house during the mornings. I remember Sanderstead's condition when we married was, that I was to change my dandy every week, and receive no morning visiters. Mortimer appears to be of poor dear Sandy's opinion touching this last point: —we shall see. Mr. Blocksford seems solicitously attentive to Helen, and his manner this year is very much altered generally: in fact, he is growing more into the world and its ways; and, considering who his mother is, the probabilities are, he will make rapid progress that way.

"I have heard nothing about her, or her annual visit: indeed, Mortimer rarely mentions her name, and looks odd when anybody else speaks of her. I think there is some understanding, arising probably out of some little misunderstanding between the 'happy' pair, that the amiable Countess is not to be a guest at Sadgrove; whence arises the awkwardness of feeling which is manifested when the subject is touched upon.

"Colonel Magnus, the odious, is to be here in a few days, at least so Mrs. Mortimer says. How she can speak of that man with patience, I cannot understand! I really believe she is too good, too confiding, and too unsophisticated for this world. Certain am I that she has not a bitterer enemy than that said Colonel. The way in which I have heard him speak of her in general society, the contemptuous tone which he assumes whenever she happens to be talked of, and the lamentation in which he indulges at the extraordinary sacrifice his friend Mortimer made in marrying her, provoke even *me*, who have no particular friendship for her, — but I hate deceit; and

whatever her failings may be,—however *brusque* her manner or equivocal her temper may have been, I cannot endure with patience hearing a person, constantly associated with a woman under the roof of her husband at that husband's invitation, speak of her in terms of such disrespect and disparagement as those which he uses when speaking of her. Whenever I find a man talking in such a manner, I suspect that his vanity has been somehow mortally offended; but in the case of Colonel Magnus, as all his love and admiration are bestowed upon himself, there is not, I think, the slightest probability of his having suffered a repulse from anybody in the world. *His* coming, however, is the signal for *my* going; and although the cave of Trophonius itself is Almacks', compared with Glumston, I shall fly to its lengthened avenues, its dingy tapestry, and its shining floors, with delight, as a refuge from an association with Colonel Magnus. He once endeavoured to 'make friends,' as they say, with poor dear Sanderstead, but he did not suit Sandy; and if he had suited *him*, he

would not have suited *me*. People who have malicious minds and evil tongues should take care before whom they speak. Colonel Magnus, I know, has said things of *me*, which, if I were silly enough to tell Sanderstead, would lead to extremities — horrible things! — But I should be both foolish and wicked to put my husband's life in peril by telling *him* all I do know.

" You must let me hear before I leave this. I propose staying only three or four days at Glumston, and then proceed to finish the season. Those Fogburys are certainly the most melancholy race alive; but as connexions of poor dear Sandy's, I must go some time or other; and the opportunity a visit now affords me of escaping my persecutor, — and the man watches one like a lynx, — is the best I can avail myself of.

" You ask me if I like Captain Harvie: — decidedly *yes!*—he is admirably good-natured, and a sincere friend of Harry's. By the way, somebody was kind enough to send me A newspaper, in which there was a paragraph about

Harry and *me.* Harry thought at one time of prosecuting the people, but by my advice he dropped all idea of it:—there is something very dreadful in having one's name canvassed in a court of law. He then talked of horsewhipping the editor, if he did not give up the author; but this would have been as bad,—worse indeed, for it might have ended more seriously for Harry,—so we agreed to burn the paper, and think no more about it. If our kind friend had not sent it, we should never have known of it; as it is, few people read the thing, and fewer care about it;—and, in fact, 'the least said is soonest mended.'

"Old Lady Bembridge remains, with that most charming and fascinating niece of hers, Miss Rouncivall: as a pair,—each in her way,—they are incomparable with anything I ever met with. The old lady is so extremely expert at *écarté*, that she can get nobody now to play with her here but Mortimer, who seems to feel it a duty to permit himself to be made a victim. Miss is smitten with young Blocksford, but to her passion, alas! there seems

'no return.' What on earth the master of the house sees in these people, who are, in fact, no friends of his, I cannot imagine: I believe he fancies his wife likes them, the which I take to be an error. They are, however, on the move; so that another ten days will leave these sylvan scenes deserted, unless their master and mistress choose to remain in their Paradise, as Miss Rouncivall calls it, where, if they propose to play Adam and Eve for the rest of the season, Colonel Magnus, who is to stay with them, is admirably qualified to make the third of the party.

"I have told you before of the little attorney who, two or three years since, came down for two days' business, over-ate and over-drank himself on the first, and was laid up with a five-weeks' fit of the gout: he is here again, only for two or three days: it is wonderful to see how careful Mr. Mortimer is of his health. He is the most ridiculous person imaginable, and not by any means safe. Only imagine, the night before last, Mortimer saved himself from old Bembridge, and set Mr. Brassey to

play *écarté* with her. The delight of this delegation was great to the little man, but most oppressive to Bem; however, so as she wins, she cares little from whom, and they started,—Mortimer advising. At about the third deal, after Mr. Brassey had cut the cards, the old lady went fidgeting about the counters, and challenged her antagonist's score, which, as she knew, was perfectly correct. Having performed these essential manœuvres, she took up the pack, and was on the point of beginning to deal, when the little man, with an energy and animation not to be described, said,—

"'Stop, my lady, if you please: your ladyship has put the wrong parcel at top. I cut to the right—eh!'

"Bem looked vexed and angry, but it was far beneath her character and station to deny what she knew to be true, and she therefore merely said, in the most dignified manner which she could assume,—

"'Did I?—I beg your pardon, sir!'

" and put the pack down upon the table, to be re-cut at the attorney's discretion. He did cut

them again, and, if the matter had rested there, all might have been well; but in order to convince Mortimer of the justice of his suspicions and the prudence of his play, when he had taken off the top packet, and took up the under one to place on the top of that, he turned it up before he deposited it, and, with a sort of wink that I never shall forget, exhibited to Mortimer a king at the bottom of it! The look of exultation which enlightened his countenance at the verification of his anticipation, was accompanied with a loud 'Umph!' and the application of his fore-finger to the side of his nose. Bem did not, or would not, see this; but poor dear Harriet certainly did. What a man to have in decent society!

"Well now, dear Alice, mind and write me a nice budget of Rillesford intelligence. I had a letter about ten days ago from poor dear Sanderstead: he was then at Malta, but expected to return to Gibraltar in a week or two. He has sent me some extremely pretty chains, one of which I intend for you, and a profusion of oranges. He writes most affectionately;

indeed, he is a dear good creature, and I sometimes wish I had gone with him; but he overruled my inclinations, and, to be sure, it would have been rather 'roughing it,' as he calls it.

"I have told Mrs. Mortimer that I have sent her kindest regards to you, so — mind I have. Harry *really* begs to be remembered; and in a perfect reliance upon hearing from you 'forthwith,' I remain, dear Alice,

"Your affectionate sister,

"M. S."

No. VII.

FROM THE SAME TO MRS. FOGBURY, GLUMSTON HALL, LEICESTERSHIRE.

Sadgrove Hall,
April 3, 18—.

"MY DEAREST MRS. FOGBURY,

"I have been for some time longing to avail myself of your kind invitation to dear Glumston. I never shall forget the many happy hours I have passed under its hospitable roof with my dear husband. You will be delighted to know that I have heard from him at Malta: his letter breathes nothing but kind-

ness and affection, and I deeply lament not having gone with him. He has sent me some beautiful presents, which I will show you when we meet.

" I write now to say that I shall be delighted to go to you next week : I assure you, I look forward with the greatest pleasure to a visit to your charming family. I trust that dear Amelia, and my favourite of all, Elizabeth, are well. George and Frederick are, I suppose, from home; however, I must take as many of you as I can find, — therefore have the kindness to let me know what day in next week I may, with least inconvenience to you, join your delightful family circle. My stay can be but short, I regret to say, as I must be in town to present a young cousin at the first drawing-room after Easter.

" As I shall have the pleasure of seeing you so soon, I need say no more at this moment but that I remain, dear Mrs. Fogbury,

" Yours most truly and sincerely,

" Mary Sanderstead."

" Best loves of all kinds to your dear en-

gaging girls, and kind regards to Mr. Fogbury.

" I forgot to say that Lord Harry Martingale,' a great friend of dear Sanderstead, will be over at Melton next week: he is going there to look at a house which he thinks of hiring for the next season. I know, as a connexion of my husband, and being in your neighbourhood, he would be delighted to pay his respects to you and Mr. Fogbury; and if you should be disposed to receive him any day during my stay with you, I shall have great pleasure in making you acquainted. He is a most excellent, amiable person, and if he takes the house he thinks of, will be a great acquisition to your neighbourhood."

The next which turns up is from a person in an humbler walk of life, but who seems destined to perform no unimportant part in the play which is acting at Sadgrove.

No. VIII.

FROM MISS MARY MITCHAM TO MISS CAROLINE WILLIAMS.

"My dear Caroline, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"When I promised to write to you regularly after I came here, I was not quite aware of the many duties I should be required to perform, and fancied that after Mrs. Mortimer was dressed for dinner, I should at least have the evenings to myself. This is not, however, the case, for Mrs. Mortimer, whose temper does not suit everybody, has, I believe, taken a great fancy to me, and makes me attend to the two children, in return for which she promises, that when they are sufficiently grown up to require a nursery governess, I shall have the situation: they are very nice children, the eldest—a boy—in particular. There is a regular nurse and nursery maid, but Mrs. Mortimer seems never satisfied unless I am there too.

"I do not regret this, as it gives me an excuse for keeping away from the housekeeper's

room, where I hear and see many things I do not like; and as Mrs. Mortimer gives me a great deal of needle-work to do, I tell them I have no time to pass in conversation and cards, in both of which they indulge in a way and at a rate which would quite astonish you. Mr. Wilkins, who is Mr. Mortimer's favourite, seems to manage everything exactly as he likes; and yet, with all this power in the house, there is not a word too bad for him to use when talking of his master, of whom he tells such stories as I am sure *he* ought to be ashamed to repeat.

"Mr. Mortimer is extremely kind and civil to *me*, and therefore it is very unpleasant for me to hear all this going on. He is very fond of his children, and comes up and sees them regularly every evening. He speaks to me just as if I were here as his equal, and so does Mrs. Mortimer; but then she sometimes is cross about nothing, and scolds without any reason. Mr. Mortimer, the other evening, bade me sit down and tell him about my family, and said, that if he could be of any service in getting

William into some public office, he would do all he could; and bade me not think of leaving, as his man Wilkins had told him I had talked of, which *is* true, but not on any account of what is happening here, but because of a letter I received from John Singleton, and which has kept me in a state of agitation and uncertainty for some days: however, having made up my mind, I am easier, and shall remain where I am, which, I think, is for the best. If you see John, do not take any notice that I have said anything about him, or his writing to me, as it might vex him, and if mother came to know anything about it she would be very angry, and I would not vex either her or poor John for the world: he is a kind and affectionate young man, but when I last saw him I could not help feeling that it *was* for the last time.

"Mr. Mortimer was kind enough to say, that if mother would like to come here to see me, she would be quite welcome, and to stay as long as she pleased; but I told him she would not be able to leave the younger chil-

dren; when he said, 'Well, then, why should not they all come?' which was very good of him. However, I shall not tell mother all this, for even if she *could* come, I should not like her, who has been used to such different ways of life, to see exactly what is going on here, which might lead her to take me away; and now that I have determined upon remaining, I should be vexed and sorry to go.

"But, Caroline, you have not heard my secret yet, — for I have one, and one which no human being but yourself will ever know. There is a French countess, a great friend of Mr. Mortimer, whom I have never seen, but of whom Mr. Wilkins, and even Mrs. Stock the housekeeper, speak very strangely, and say that when she is here she is more mistress of the house than Mrs. Mortimer; and add that she has more right to be, if all was known that is true, — with none of which I meddle or make: but she has a son by a former husband, Mr. Francis Blocksford. Oh! Caroline dear, I tremble all over when I write his name! For Heaven's sake! Caroline, never mention

it, — never let my poor dear mother hear it:— he is the handsomest, cleverest, kindest, best of human beings! Mr. Mortimer is very fond of him, and is constantly with him; but the moment he can get away, up he goes to the nursery to enquire after the children. If I am there, he will stay playing with them till Mrs. Mortimer or somebody else comes; and as his room is on the same staircase with the nursery, he always contrives some excuse to see me.

"Caroline dear, I know it is wrong that I should encourage hopes of a fate so far beyond my deserts, and so much above my rank in the world, but he has told me that he loves me better than his life; and when I have bid him not talk so, he has declared, upon his honour and truth, that if I would but consent, he would marry me the day after he is of age, which is in less than a week from this time. What am I to say or do, Caroline? It is hard to struggle against the affection I feel for one so good, and so honourable, and so charming: but if I listen to him, and say 'yes' to his proposals, what would those who have been so

kind to *me* say? What would Mr. Mortimer, who couldn't be fonder of him if he was his own son, say? — or what would Mrs. Mortimer, who puts perfect confidence in my steadiness and propriety, think? Might I not even involve *him* in endless quarrels with his mother, whose temper is reported to be most violent? He says he is prepared to meet all *that*, that he has sufficient fortune of his own to justify his making his own choice, and that he never will rest till I have agreed to it.

"What he says, dear Caroline, about it, is, after all, not so unreasonable: it is not as if he were going to marry a person raised from a low origin to a highly respectable situation. The situation I now fill I have fallen to, through inevitable misfortune; that makes a great difference. I once told him that I would consult mother upon it, but he would not hear of it; he apprehended that she would feel it her duty to make the matter known, and that then we should be separated eternally; so I shall say nothing at home. The other day he lent me Pamela, a book I had never seen be-

fore, in which our history is very nearly told, and 'Virtue is rewarded' in the end; but novels and real life are not much alike; and yet I feel that all my hopes of happiness depend upon the result of our affection. The other day I was singing to the children, and when I turned round, there was *he*, standing listening. He seemed quite delighted to find that I was in some degree accomplished; and ever since he has left the door of his sitting-room open, and plays so sweetly on the guitar, accompanying such beautiful songs, all on purpose to please me, — because, of course, I cannot hear him in the evenings below.

"One day Mr. Mortimer proposed that I should let the company hear me sing; but I pleaded so strongly against it, and explained to him how painful it would be to me, who once belonged to at least respectable society, to be let in to the drawing-room on sufferance to exhibit, that a compromise was made by Mrs. Mortimer; and Lady Mary Sanderstead and Miss Rouncivall came up to the nursery, and I sang to them: and that day Francis, —

I have written it again, — Francis came up too, and made me sing a duet with him. I did not much like Lady Mary's manner: she seemed to take no manner of notice of me; but she is a fine singer herself, and, I suppose, despised my 'humble efforts.'

"You will see by all this, Caroline dear, the way in which I am treated; give me, then, your advice as to my conduct with regard to the one great step in my life. Ought I at once to tell Mrs. Mortimer all the circumstances of the case, and leave the place, and every hope of future peace of mind? or can I, without violating the confidence reposed in me, and repaying kindness with ingratitude, secure happiness to myself and confer it on another, while, without one interested feeling in the world, I may restore my beloved mother and her dear children to their place in the world, (for this will, by *his* own promise, be the consequence of our marriage,) and ensure me the unfading love of one who has made himself fatally dear to me? The trial is a severe one; it is one in which I cannot be my own judge:

to you, dear Caroline, I submit myself, and by your decision will I be guided. Take time to consider and weigh the circumstances; do not be carried away by a kind anxiety for my welfare; rather consider whether that welfare is compatible with honour and justice. I own, my dear Caroline, that I earnestly hope you may decide favourably; but fear not — do what is right. Tell me how to act; and in a firm reliance on the qualities of your head and heart, I will act up to your decision without one sigh or one murmur. I shall make some reasonable excuse for quitting this, which I shall do, if I can, without inconveniencing Mrs. Mortimer, the moment I receive your unfavourable decree: if you determine for me otherwise, you shall hear further of what I intend to do.

"Yours always most truly,

"Mary Mitcham."

No. IX.

FROM THE SAME TO MR. JOHN SINGLETON.

"My dear John, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"I was surprised, and sadly vexed, at receiving your letter of the 1st; surprised, because I did not expect any letters to be addressed to me here, and, least of all, one from you so long after my leaving home; and vexed, because it cannot fail to give pain to those who are obliged to inflict it upon others.

"You most truly say that I was pleased and delighted in your society, and our constant association for a year or two, made me feel that you were one of our family; but, my dear John, recollect how differently we are now circumstanced: I have sunk from the place which I then held, humble as it was, in life, and you are grown, like myself, two or three years older. Indeed, dear John, although I always looked upon you as one of ourselves, my feelings towards you were those of a sister towards a brother; and never, until I received your

letter of the day before yesterday, did I fancy that I had excited any other sentiment in your heart.

"Dear John, forgive me; but I am sure, as in the end candour is best, so is it in the beginning, and therefore do not hate me when I tell you, fairly and honestly, that you have entirely mistaken the character of my affection for you, — for affection it was and is. It is true that I accepted a lock of your hair, and gave you one of mine; it is true that I always preferred dancing with you to dancing with anybody else, and it is true that I always loved to sing the songs you liked; but, dear John, this meant nothing more than that, being cousins, we were kind and affectionate cousins, and that I never intended to infer that I was actuated by any feeling beyond that of kind and affectionate relationship.

"Besides, dear John, I say again, consider the difference of my position now from that in which you were accustomed to see and know me: I am now neither more nor less than a servant. What would dear Mrs. Singleton say if

you were to bring home a wife from a menial situation? — It would break her heart, John; and as I know your dutiful and affectionate feelings as a son, I am quite sure you would not hazard her happiness in such a matter, even if I were to admit that which I deny, any previous knowledge of the character of your affection for me.

"No, dear John, let me remain your fond cousin; fancy me your sister, having none of your own, and rely upon me for returning all your regard and love (if you please) in that character — anything more is out of the question; and as for the violence of your expressions towards the end of your letter, let me entreat you to calm the feelings which have given rise to them. Indeed, John, even if I were devoted to you, I am not worthy of your kindness. You have just entered upon a business of high respectability, and God grant, my dear John, that it may answer your most sanguine expectations! Look round you, and endeavour to secure in marriage some worthy, amiable woman, who may possess the means of

increasing your store and advancing your interests; not unless you love her; but do, for *my* sake, make yourself happy with a wife who deserves you.

" As for myself, it is impossible to say what my fate may be. All I entreat and implore of you is, to think nothing of anything that may have passed in the way of joke between us; and lest you should imagine that I am trifling with you, dear John, I enclose in the 'frank' in which I send this, the only two letters I have of yours, and that very lock of hair of which I spoke: burn mine, dear John; it is not worth returning.

" This gives me great pain, for, as children, we were happy together, and grew up happy together; and I could have gone on, happy in the knowledge of your esteem and regard, but you have opened my eyes by your last letter, and forced me to speak the truth: — and yet forgive me — try — but I know that is difficult — to separate the love which we *may* feel for each other, and which I do feel for *you*, from that which you wish to inspire. Be my

dearest, best friend, dear John: love me, I again entreat you, as a sister; but forget that you ever wrote the letter which I now return to you.

"Upon second thoughts, I will still keep the lock of your hair until you tell me that you are satisfied with my proposal. If I consider it as a brother's, I may still retain it; and then, when I look at it and think of other days, I shall say to myself, John is reasonable, and sees the justice of what I have written, and I have in him a brother who loves me. Write, therefore, once more to me, and tell me that you forgive me, and will do as I bid you.

"Before I conclude, let me beg you, dear John, not to let my mother know that you have written to me. I do not think it likely you would do so; but I should be very unhappy if she knew anything about it, and therefore I think it best to say so.

"Assure yourself that I am very happy and comfortable here. Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer are extremely kind to me, and so is everybody in the house. My health is much improved by

living in this excellent air; and I want nothing to make me happy but to hear that you take what I have written in good part, and that you believe me to be, as I really am, dear John,

"Your affectionate playfellow of other days, and, — if you please, — your loving sister at present,

"MARY MITCHAM."

It will be seen by Miss Mitcham's letters, that although no very great scholar, she had been sufficiently well educated to fill not only the situation which she actually held, but even that which she was, at the period when these letters were written, not very far from attaining.

It would be invidious, and probably beyond the province of a mere opener of letters, to make any remark upon this correspondence, or excite a desire in the mind of the reader to institute an enquiry as to the causes which produced Miss Mitcham's missive to Mr. John Singleton, or as to the ultimate retention of the lock of his hair, upon the Platonic system, until she should hear whether he were inclined to

subscribe to her doctrines upon that particular point. As it has been agreed that all the parties to this exploded correspondence should tell their own stories, it may be fairest and best to say nothing, but turn to the next of the collection, which turns out to be —

No. X.

FROM LORD HARRY MARTINGALE TO MR. HAWES, MELTON.

"Mr. Hawes, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"I shall be at Melton on the 9th: get me some comfortable rooms. I shall bring no horses over, and only one servant. I wish, if there is any house to let either in or near the town, you would get the particulars, and let me find them upon my arrival. I do not want anything of the sort for myself, but I should like to hear, on account of a friend of mine.

"H. Martingale."

No. XI.

MR. BRIMMER BRASSEY, "GENT. — ONE," &c. TO MR. DRIVER.

"DEAR D. Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

"We have so much to do in the way of pleasure here, slap-bang, and all that, that I really have no time for writing, although Squire Flat is uncommon sharp, as he thinks, in business, and keeps poring over some ridiculous point for hours, after having given up all I want in five minutes: he is quite one of your camel-swallowers. However, all goes right: his confidence in M. is wonderful, and it is, of course, my game to keep that up.

"I think I shall get him to sign the mortgages to-morrow. I want to get the thing done before M. comes, and he is expected in a day or two. I have put it all in a right train, and the chances are ten to one, if he come himself, it will all be blown up.

"It would make you open your eyes to see the things that are going on here. Mortimer

himself is in love with his wife's maid — dead — over head and ears: she is really an uncommon nice creature, but not fit to be a maid in such a house as this. Only think what a silly person the lady is to have such a girl in the family, especially knowing what she must know of her husband. Luckily Miss M. does not seem to 'come to corn,' as we say at the 'Slap-bang,' with him: yet she is deucedly good-natured, and, I think, fancies me to be about the best of the bunch here.

"I must just tell you. The night before last, or the night before that,—I forget which, —I was playing *écarté* with the Right Honourable the Countess of Bemerton, rather an old friend of mine, who is down here, and, by jingo! when I had cut the cards, I saw her take up the pack I had cut off, with the king of hearts at the bottom, and clap it smack under the other, just crossing it backwards and forwards, and leaving it just as it was. 'Hallo!' says I, 'my lady: come, come — fair play 's a jewel: — take the right pack — no shuffling!' 'Gad, you can't think how the people round

looked; but everybody seemed quite delighted with my presence of mind.

"There is one thing I have to say; if old Batley asks about the Exchequer bills, tell him they are at my banker's; and if he wants any statement of accounts, say you cannot do anything in it till I come to town: from what I hear of his brother, he is in a bad way. I suppose he goes there again now, as usual. If anything happens in Grosvenor Street, I think he will find the widow (for the second time) a troublesome customer, for she never has forgiven the trick he played her about the jointure.

"I expect to get away the day after to-morrow; but as it is holiday-time, and the people here try to make it pleasant to me, I do not so much mind for a day or two. Lady Mary Sanderstead and Lord Harry are here as usual, and I suppose, as it is the fashion, it is all right; but there never was anything so plain as that.

"Mr. Mortimer tells me he is going to write to M. to-day, and, I suppose, upon *that* subject particularly. I never saw a man so low

in spirits as he is: he walks about the room, groaning and rolling his eyes about like an actor; and yet, for all I can understand, unless Miss Mitcham is very ill-natured, I see no reason for it; for if M. *does* let him in for a few thousands, he has plenty to bear that without feeling it.

"I shall write to old Batley to-morrow, and so you may tell him. If Hammond or Wood call, take care that he does not see either of them; and tell Wood that he must manage about the shares before Saturday — he will know what I mean. If Stephens chooses to come down handsomely, you may tell him I think I can induce the plaintiff to compromise; and, pray, mind about Atkinson's acceptance. You must tell him that it has been paid away, and will inevitably be presented when due; and you had better get young Fibbs, and anybody else whose name Stephens does not know, to endorse it. There is no chance of his paying it, and the more names on the back of it the better. Of course, it will be renewed for fifty, with another name: we must not let him run too far.

"If Cornet Tips comes about *his* business, say you cannot settle anything till I return to town; but puff up the three horses: don't let him have a trial; say the owner is in the country. I think, if we can get him to take two of them for a hundred and sixty guineas, charging him thirty for discount and agency, we may manage to do his bill for two hundred and fifty, which will leave him 40*l.* 10*s.* to receive in cash.

"I suppose everything is alive and kicking at the 'S.-B.' I assure you, I wish I was there every night of my life; for here, although everything is uncommon genteel, there are no suppers; and as for a glass of rum punch or whiskey toddy, you might as well look for it in the fish-pond as in the drawing-room. I see Thumpkin's farce was produced on Tuesday. It seems to have made a hit: I am glad of it. Thumpkin stands very high with the public already, and this will add to his fame; it must be very gratifying to him. I was speaking of him here yesterday after dinner, and only think, Mortimer said he never had heard of him! To be sure, M. lives quite

out of the gay world ; but it is very surprising to me to find such ignorance where one should not expect it.

" Mind and remember me to old Jacob. If you hear *very* bad accounts of Jack B., write by return, as I do not want the old gentleman to be first in Grosvenor Street.

" Yours truly,

" J. BRIMMER BRASSEY."

The next letter is, we perceive, from Mr. Wilkins to his brother Thomas.

No. XII.

" DEAR TOM, Sadgrove Hall, April 3, 18—.

" You may fairly congratulate me upon the success of my operations with my gentleman. During the last few days he has given me several proofs of his confidence, and I have every reason to believe that, if I can get Crawley out, you will see me land-steward and chief manager of the Sadgrove property. I never could forgive Crawley's attempts to undermine

me; and the opportunity having offered of making Mr. Mortimer suspect that all is not going right, it was too good to be lost.

"You must know, there is one thing which has brought Mortimer and me nearer to each other lately than anything else perhaps could have done, and that is, his jealousy of his wife. Now, you pretty well know my opinion of the lady, who, if she had her own way, would absolutely starve the house, and who, I believe and I know, hates *me*, because she thinks I have more power over the master of it than she has. Once or twice she has tried to get me out altogether; and I have found out that she has lately been warning her maid—that pretty girl I wrote to you about—against me: she had better warn her against somebody else. However, if I play my game well, as things are going on, I think the chances are, if there is any doubt as to who is to *go*, she is more likely to depart than me. You shall hear, and judge for yourself.

"Mr. Mortimer, after having been desperately sulky, as I told you, about the lady and

young B., has at length resolved upon taking some active measures about it; and that he is in earnest you may be sure, because he has spoken to *me* upon it, and asked me sundry questions, to which, as you may be sure, I did not give very careless answers. He began by saying that he did not think it impossible but that he might break up his establishment here, and go abroad; that circumstances might happen, — and so on; and then added,—'If that were the case, after what you have told me about old Crawley, I think I should leave you here as land-steward and manager of the estate, with Crawley's house and salary.'

"Of course I thanked him, and finding him just in the humour to talk of what I knew was uppermost in his mind, I said I hoped the day was far distant when he should leave the place where he was so much beloved and respected! — (he being, as I need not tell you, hated all over the neighbourhood) — and that led him on to say something more; till he at last said, that what he alluded to was my mistress's conduct, which gave him great pain.

My mistress, indeed !—the moment he said that, I was sure I had him safe. I never knew a gentleman go down stairs to make a confidant upon family matters, who was not regularly thrown over. I looked down, and affected not to understand him: at last, after again expressing his perfect reliance on me, he asked if I had not heard what he alluded to spoken of ? I hesitated, and hummed and hah'd, which hit him harder than if I had spoken out; and after a good deal of boggling and haggling, he engaged my services to watch and discover the truth.

" Now, the best of the thing is this: it is quite true that young B. has been a great deal here since I have been here, and, sure enough, is extremely free and easy with the lady; but the change which Mortimer has seen in B., and all his anxiety to be up-stairs, and about where the lady is, is owing to his being over head and ears in love with her maid in question. Now, if I had told M. this, the mystery would have been solved, and Miss Mitcham, in all probability, sent off, and my lady quite

cleared in her husband's eyes, which, you will please to observe, is not my game. I can see as far through a millstone as my neighbours. Mrs. Mortimer's temper is what they call a very sweet one, — when she is pleased; but when it flares up, I will leave you to imagine what it is. Being, as I believe she is, perfectly innocent, and uncommon fond of M., and bearing the domineering of his dear friend the Countess, the least thing said to her cross by M. sets her off into a bitter passion: this I know for a fact from Mrs. Woodgate, who was here with her before Miss Mitcham. Now, if I can work up my respected master to tax her to her face with being in love with B., you 'll see what will happen; — she will do something that will make a sensation, as they say.

"You will perceive that this is not so difficult to bring about as you might at first imagine; it is only reporting to him what B. does in the way of slinking up-stairs, and sitting with his room-door open singing love-songs to his guitar; and going to see the children whenever he can get an opportunity, for the purpose of talking to Mitcham, and which seldom happens

unless the lady is there too. *I* need not know that this is all meant for the maid — don't you see, Tom? And more than *that*, if I am not mistaken, the young gentleman has got a trick of writing notes to his beloved: — much may be made of this. And what puts me more at my ease in these manœuvrings is, that Mortimer himself is so much in love with Mitcham, and she is so remarkably civil and engaging to him, that he never suspects in the least that B. is after her too, or that she encourages *him*, which she most undoubtedly does. I owe *her* no great deal of affection: she holds herself a little too high for me, but, I think, she must have a little pull down too: that, however, is matter for hereafter. If I can stir up a good sound quarrel between the two heads, my belief is, that what with the jealousy of B. on the one hand, and love for Miss M. on the other, — falling in with the lady's high spirit, — I shall do the job, and secure myself the uncontrolled command of this place, which, ten to one, M. will never see again, if such an affair takes place.

"I dare say, you think me a sad rogue;

however, it don't seem to me that you can find fault, considering how you yourself manage to feather your own nest. If I should want an anonymous letter or two to feed the flame, I will send you a rough copy, which you can write out, as nobody here knows enough of your hand to trace it; but, I think, B. is so young and so giddy, that I can trap him without much trouble. Colonel Magnus is expected, and I know he will do the scheme no harm. He is about as good a friend of the lady as I am. Some people say that he wished to be very civil, indeed, to her, and that her sharp refusal of his attentions turned him into an enemy. How that may be, I know not, but, I believe, he was always against M.'s marrying at all; at all events, he will do me no harm.

"I am exceedingly civil to the old brute Crawley, and get Mrs. Stock to order nice things to be sent every now and then to his daughters. I am particularly kind to the youngest, who, as it strikes me, would have no objection to become Mrs. Wilkins. I shall

humour this, because it puts the old fellow off his guard, and makes him believe that I do not know all that he has done to try to get *me* out.

"I believe the lady's father is dying: if this should send her off to Town, something may be done here in her absence. You may take my word for it, she shall get all she deserves from *me* for her past kindness. When you write, get somebody else to direct the letter, in case I should want what I mentioned. Remember me to all friends, and believe me

"Yours affectionately,

"R. WILKINS."

The reader must begin to perceive that the "wheel within wheel" system was actively at work in the terrestrial paradise which seems to be so very strangely inhabited. A few more specimens will suffice to put him *au fait* as to their various and varying interests.

No. XIII.

FROM RACHEL STUBBS TO RICHARD TURNER.

"Dere Richud, Sadgrov, April 3, 18—.

"I receved yewer kind leather on Fryday, wich fond me in good helth, but not spirts,—for sins yew went a whay i have encresed my sise hand teers. yew was kindust off the kind, and i cud have wukked has kitching-mad frum marwn to nite if yew had note gon; but sins yew want away iviry think sims to go rong. Muster Fishir, wich is, ginrilly speking, has gemmunly a Cock as is, scalds me iviry day for nott beasting the jints; hand Missus Stoak says I pays no manor of respict to her for nott gitting their diners better dun, wich I bleve, Richud, his owen to yewer habsence. If I thote all wot yew sed was sinsear hand yew ment it, i wud giv wharning hand go hat my munt; but praps, deer Richud, yew whas only roging me, wich wud be onkind and crule. Tommus Wite is halways laffing hat me about yew, haud says i ham a grate fowl hif I wait for yew, for yew ment nuthink, and says it is eye

tim i was marred, wich he wood willinly do imself; but i says, no, Tommus, i likes yew well enuff, but as long has Richud Turner sticks to is bargin, i ham is, hand is aloan.

"Wat i rites now for, his to hask yew wat yew wood lick me two do. my muther, i know, cud neerly funnish a rome for hus, and pot in a Tabbel and chares and a chest of drarers, hand a Bedd, wich is the most Hessensheal hof hall, hand wood be quite haggreable to the mach; hand hif we cood bitter hourselfs buy aving a frunt were we cood sell Hoysters hand srimps, hand red Earings, and sich lick, hin wintur; hand Soddy wattur, hand Pop, hand them kind of harticles, hin summer; i might tunn a peny wile yew wos hin playse, hif yew Kontinewd hin survice, hand hif not, do togither in bisness; wich wud save me from brileing my fayse hin the rosting hand beasting, wich most do till I leave, or get a cocks playse in a small famly.

"i know that Martha, the fot kitching-mad hat Sur Kristuffer Kaddingtuns, kepp cumpny halong with won of the futmun, hand she

was marred, hand they sot up a Tombandjery shopp, hand is reelizing a furtun; but i shud objeck to a Tomhandjery shopp because of the low confersation wich gose hon hin sich playses, has well has the smel of the Pips, wych makes me sike.

"Deer Richud, i ham wiling to do hanything for yew, hand wuk day and night opon my ands hand neese to make yew cumfurtable, hand i think we cud be very appy; but do not make a fowl hof me now, hand i will truss yew hall my life; hand my Muther his a woman well to doo, hand wen it pleses Purvidence to tack her up hout of this wuld will leve us sumthing for a raney day, wich wud be a grate cumfut to me, appen wen it may.

"i pot this hin a buskett, hand have sent yew three fools and a small Sammon cott this mawning, for yewer Sister Lizy, wich altho i never seed hur i ham very fond hof from yewer subscription on her,—hif she will haxcept the triffles i shal be plesed, hand my love; hand wen yew are a heating the fools, do nott forget her wich sent them.

"Hif yew lick, yew can call on muther, wich is the darey at the korner of Jon street, and tawk maters over with hur. i am tird hof life down here without yew. i hope yew will get this safe. I have got Tommus Wite to rite the redress, not honely because he rites a good and, but to show im thatt we hare frends.

"do let me here from yew; and with true love and frenchship, in wich yewer sister his inklewded, beleve me, dear Richud,

"yewers internally,

"RACHEL STUBBS."

"i ave pade the Courage hand Bucking."

It is painful to think that, as far as we have yet gone, the most sincere and least artificial letter of the whole collection should be that of Miss Stubbs: it is characterized by a candour which the habits and customs of better society refine away generally to nothing. Miss Stubbs, the kitchen-maid, did not feel a warmer affection for Mr. Richard Turner, than Miss Rouncivall did for Mr. Francis Blocksford; but nothing can be more different than the lines taken by

the two enamoured ones under nearly similar circumstances. The only resemblance to be found between the letters of the victims is, in the proverbially feminine pithiness of their postscripts. We now come to another specimen of a different character.

XIV.

FROM FRANCIS MORTIMER, ESQ. TO COLONEL MAGNUS.

"My dear Friend, Sadgrove, April 3, 18—.

"The postponement of your visit vexes me greatly: every arrangement has been, or will be made before this day is over, to put you completely at your ease. Pray, therefore, do not longer delay your departure from Calais, for I have need of your society and advice.

"The state in which I exist is too dreadful to describe; and the tortures I endure are in no degree alleviated by the recollection of your too justly realized prophecies, nor by the peculiar circumstances connected with the dreadful

fulfilment. I have long doubted,—and feared; but those feelings have given place to something like a horrid certainty that I am hated by Helen, — and that she is loved by another, and that other — Francis Blocksford! Conceive this; only imagine the fearfulness of the combination.

" I have felt more at my ease since I confessed to you the character and nature of the *liaison* between me and the Countess. Forgive me, my dear friend, for having so long and so positively denied the allegations of my sister upon that point to you, from whom I ought to have had no secrets; but recollect how many people are compromised by the admission : — and, after all, what *is* the admission?—for although I have never dropped a hint or an allusion to Helen which could awaken her suspicions in the smallest degree, I am convinced she is aware of the nature of my thraldom to the Countess; yet, from the course she is now pursuing, most assuredly not to its fullest extent.

" A fate seems to hang over me, which at

all times, and upon all occasions, places me in the most painful positions. Conceive that when poor Batley — (and I say poor Batley, for I believe he is dying, and, although his conduct and character were never calculated to excite respect or secure esteem, we were once great friends,—would to Heaven the connexion between us had never been more intimate !) — conceive, I say, that when he took it into his head to marry the silly person who is now his wife, he should have selected the Bishop of Dorchester to perform the ceremony, he being the only human being alive who positively knows the secret which binds me to the Countess. We were at Florence—she was dying: he was, like ourselves, a visiter, and the only English clergyman there. She was given over: he visited her, — afforded her spiritual assistance, — and, in the firm belief that her recovery was impossible, she unburthened her conscience by confessing her sins; and, on what she believed her death-bed, confided to Sydenham the fact that her only son was not the son of her husband: — that son, as you know, is Francis

Blocksford. Imagine, then, that of all the clergymen in England, — of all the bishops on the bench, — this very Sydenham should have been selected to perform a wedding ceremony at which that Mrs. Blocksford, as Countess St. Alme, and I, as the son-in-law of the matured bridegroom, were to be present.

"You will now more plainly than ever see the racking difficulties in which the follies — vices, my dear Magnus, is the word, — of my early life have involved me. With this claim upon me,—for upon *me* the claim was,—Mrs. Blocksford, feeling herself sure and certain that when her husband, who was thirty years her senior, died, she should at least have so much reparation done to her feelings, — rendered more acute, of course, by the consciousness that she had confessed her fault, — as might be afforded her by marrying the man for whom she had fallen. There was the wound which burns and rankles! Instead of treasuring up my heart for her, the crowning event of my degradation occurred while yet her husband was alive; and when Amelia's divorce was followed

by our marriage, Mrs. Blocksford was again at the point of death! Her violence of disposition, acting upon her constitution, had nearly ended her career, — but again she recovered; and seeing the impossibility of carrying her point, — that of becoming *my* wife, — she married the unfortunate man who has given her a title, likely, she thought, to secure her something like a place in foreign society, which might have been denied to the widow of an English merchant.

" Strange coincidence, that circumstances, wholly unforeseen by me when I left her in Italy, should have combined to make me marry,—pledged, as I felt myself, to her; and that she, being free some few years after, should again have married not six months before I became a widower! There is in all this a mysterious counteraction of vice: — hopes, sown in guilt, bloom not! And now, as a climax to the whole, I am assured, convinced by a thousand combining circumstances, my wife is devoted to ——! — I cannot write the word. Magnus, the true Hell for a sinner is his own conscience!

"Can you fancy any human being tortured as I am at this moment? I associate much — nay, almost constantly in the morning, — with Francis. He speaks of Helen — strangely enough — as if she were a near relation; and, when they are together in society, his manners to her are those of a brother; but latterly he has become melancholy and abstracted, shuns company, and devotes his attention to Helen's children. This strikes me forcibly: I understand the feeling; I myself have felt it, as Byron has described it.

"I have but one person in my whole establishment that I can trust,—my house-steward, Wilkins. You know how often I have proved his fidelity. Of course, I should not let drop one word to him likely to imply a doubt upon such a subject as this, but, in speaking on business with him, something occurred which led to it accidentally; and although he said nothing, I saw from the honest fellow's embarrassment, and from half-words which he inadvertently muttered, that the thing is talked of in the family. Now, just picture to yourself

this! A suggestion to Francis to leave Sadgrove reported to his mother, would raise a storm which nothing could allay: a hint to Helen would, as I know from experience, be equally productive of violence, and an open rupture between us. The Countess, relying entirely upon her visits to us for admission into good English society, is already furious at not being invited this year. Helen's condition that she should not come, proves to me that she knows more than she ought to know about her, and moreover that she does not wish to have her here as a restraint upon her son. I fear much, my dear friend, that this state of things cannot long endure; I cannot bear it.

"Helen is devoted to her children; but more so, I think, since Francis has chosen to be so fond of them. Dear children!—why am I not permitted to be happy? Why —— But I will not write thus. Come to me: *you* might, perhaps, speak to young Blocksford in a way which I cannot,--might rally him on his sunken spirits, and even altered appearance. I dare not trust myself to remark upon them to Helen.

" My sister writes me word that she has abandoned her intention of coming to England, and, as far as I can see, has resolved upon ending her days abroad. Her dear friend has married both her daughters, — one to an English squire, and the other to a French officer; and has, jointly with Mrs. Farnham, taken a chateau, as it is called there, near Beaugency; a pretty enough village on the banks of the Loire, nearly midway between Orleans and Blois. Helen expresses the greatest anxiety that she should pay us a visit; and, if I could feel that she was acting sincerely by me, I should say it is most right and proper that her sister-in-law should be of our circle, — (although as a permanent visiter I must beg to decline her,) — and would write, and press her to come and bring her friend; but I feel that Helen is only playing a part, and I shall say no more about it.

" We have but a few people here, and those old stagers. Lady Mary Sanderstead leaves us in a day or two, and, of course, so does Harry; the Bembridges are also on the wing

I am dead-sick and tired of them all; and yet the common observances of society force me to appear perfectly delighted with their presence. Brassey will, I hope, be here when you come; not because I wish his stay to be long, but because, I trust, your absence will be short. Forgive me this letter, so full of my own cares and troubles; the only relief I experience is in telling them to the only person in the world to whom I would permit them to be told.

"Ever yours, dear Magnus, F. M."

In this extremely candid letter of Mr. Mortimer we find him concealing from his bosom-friend one or two points of great importance, which, however, involve conduct on his own part not to be admitted even in a communication so particularly unreserved. He dwells with acute sensibility upon the probability of Helen's attachment to Francis, but sinks altogether his own unequivocal admiration of Miss Mitcham, to whom he makes not the slightest allusion. In ordinary cases there would be

nothing extraordinary in a man not mentioning his wife's maid in a letter to a friend; but, considering the position of the gentleman to whom this confession of sins and sorrows is confided, it is rather remarkable that one of the leading causes of the writer's distraction and unhappiness finds no place in its pages; neither do we find any reference to what appeared by Wilkins' letter to his brother,—the commands of the writer to that worthy to keep watch over the conduct of his wife; nor of the implied reward for his exertions in the appointment of land-steward at Sadgrove: in fact, Mortimer, in the midst of his candour, trusts Magnus only with facts and surmises which affect his own view of the present state of things, and favour the course he seems to have chosen to adopt.

We have nearly come to the end of our letters; but one which follows is curious, as illustrative of the enthusiasm of artists in whatever line they labour, and of the importance which every man, let his calling be what it may, attaches to the craft generally, and his

own personal share in it particularly. Mr. Fisher, the cook, writes thus to a Fellow of the same Society.

"My dear Sir, Sadgrove, April 3, 18—.

"I acknowledge your kind letter of Thursday, which I should have answered sooner, but really have had no time. I thank you for your idea of the *pigeons à-la-maréchale.* I have for several years contemplated something of the sort myself; but the suggestion of frying the *ravigotte* in butter, and moistening it with *consommé* and Spanish sauce, is perfectly new to me. The shalots are very tempting, I admit; but, in looking at the general state of society, I am apprehensive that anything more than a transient suspicion of their actual presence must be avoided.

"As to the question you ask with regard to my position, I confess I am not entirely satisfied: there are scarcely sufficient opportunities here of putting myself forward. We have generally the same set of people staying in the house; and it naturally occurs that, when such

is the case, a professional man is more driven to his resources to produce a variety, than when the company change more frequently. I begin to suspect that Mr. Mortimer himself has no great taste in art. I often ask if they have heard him express any opinion of such and such a dish to which I have devoted my energies, and find that he has not even tasted it, but has dined on the roast. This is, I confess, disheartening, but I compound for it under the circumstances, that mild air and gentle carriage exercise have been recommended me.

" A Mr. Pash has been down here, who appears to have an exceedingly good idea of things generally. We had several very interesting conversations upon the subject of my *matier*, and he was good enough to favour me with a recipe for *Sauce à-la-Pash*, as he says, M. Ude has been so kind as to name it in his general classification. It is evidently the work of an amateur, but there is a character of genius about it. I have subjoined a copy of it: — 'Two pounds of veal, three or four slices of ham, the backs and legs of two partridges,

with a quarter of a pint of good stock,—the partridges, of course, on the top,—over a slow fire in stew-pan, to sweat. When the partridges are enough, moisten with *consommé*, and throw in trimmings of mushrooms and truffles, a little mace, a clove or two, three or four allspice, a bay-leaf, and, if you dare venture, two or three young onions. The whole of this is to boil till the partridges are enough; then strain the *consommé;* add some bechamel with some game-glaze, and about a wine-glass full of thick cream, to keep the colour light: then fry some truffles, and put them by themselves in a stew-pan till you want to dish-up your fillets.' Now, although I detect a little plagiarism in *this*, still, as I say, for an amateur, it shows both research and genius.

"The real truth is, I feel mortified at being kept down by a want of ardour in our patrons. We hear a great deal of Scott, and Southey, and Byron, and Wordsworth; and folks talk of Lawrence, and Reynolds, and Wren, and Rennie, and all the rest of it; but what is poetry, of which not one person in ten thousand is a judge, to cooking? Painting is

an absurdity by comparison. A Macedoine of mine involves more research than one of Martin's finest pictures; his is all oil — monotonous: Turner's finest drawing does not cost him so much labour as one of my *omelettes aux fines herbes*. Look at St. Paul's or Waterloo Bridge, — why, my dear sir, the men who build these things know, that when they chip stones to a certain size, and lay them in certain spots, and bed them in a certain quantity of mortar, there they will stay, and the execution will be exactly like the design, and all will go well; but with us,—Lord bless my soul! how is it possible to answer with any certainty for the effect of our *feuilletage?* — how ensure the just proportions of a *crocquette*, or the exact flavour of a *remoulade?* We work, comparatively, in the dark, my dear sir; hence the difficulty of making a reputation, or maintaining one when made.

"Greatly are we indebted to M. Ude for his elaborated history of the rise and progress of cookery. Little did the world think, till that work was published, that Martin Luther was the first great reformer of the kitchen!

What does he say too, my dear sir, of Gonthier D'Andernach, who raised the culinary edifice, as Descartes, a century after him, raised that of philosophy? — Both introduced doubts, — the one in the moral, the other in the physical world: Gonthier is the father of cookery, as Descartes is of French philosophy. Then came Catherine, the daughter of Lorenzo de' Medici. Look at Henry de Valois,— to which illustrious man M. Ude attributes the invention of the *fricandeau!* What does the eloquent author say upon this point?

"'Did ever any one suspect the efforts of genius which the invention of so simple a machine as the wheelbarrow cost Pascal, its inventor? Schrœter, in his excellent treatise on Astronomy, vol. ii. considers the invention of the spinning-wheel to be more surprising than the discovery of the great laws of Nature by Kepler, — that the squares of the times of the revolutions of the planets are to one another as the cubes of the great axes of their orbits: — and Schrœter is right. As to my own opinion,' says M. Ude, 'respecting the

superiority of these three productions of human reason,—the wheelbarrow, the fricandeau, and the spinning-wheel, I should give the fricandeau the second place, which, if my memory deceive me not, is the rank M. de Fontanes assigns to the 'Martyrs' of M. de Chateaubriand between the two finest poems of the intellectual world.'

"We are much indebted to M. Ude's research upon this all-important subject. The way in which he puts down Henry the Third of France, and gives thanks to Providence that Charles the Ninth had been preserved by having the immortal De l'Hôpital placed about him. Henry the Fourth justly falls under his censure; and, in fact, as you know, he dates the art of making sauces from the age of Louis the Fourteenth: till that period, strange and disgusting as it may seem, meat was either roasted or broiled! Now, what I have before said personally of myself about sauces, and the delicacy and difficulty of treating the subject, you will see by M. Ude, that St. Augustin said before me, '*Omnis pulchritudinis forma*

unitas est,'—therefore there must be unity in every good sauce; there is harmony of taste, and colours, and sounds: if it were not so, why should the organ of taste be wounded by one composition, and so agreeably flattered by another? To appreciate a sauce, a delicate palate is as necessary to these kinds of cooks as a refined ear to a musician. Father Castel wanted only nine scientific eyes to feel the harmony of his colours; and a skilful sauce-maker requires only an experienced palate to taste the harmony of the flavours of his ragouts:—Pash has this quality to perfection.

"You will, I know, forgive my quoting from our great contemporary; but I am an enthusiast, and hope some day to make a name which shall last: in fact, my principal motive in worrying you just now is to ask you to keep your eyes open if anything should turn up which you think may suit me, and which I could with propriety accept. Mine, at present, really is ungrateful work; and except, as I have already said, for the air and exercise, I could not have endured it so long as I have. We have a nice light claret here which agrees with

me, and Wilkins and I are *d'accord* altogether. Of course, I see very little of what is going on in the family, but, from what I hear, the lady and gentleman of the house lead a sort of cat-and-dog life; and Wilkins himself, who informs me that he is in great favour with the latter, is, as he hints, likely to marry one of the prettiest girls I ever saw, — a Miss Mitcham, — a kind of shabby-genteel dependant of the former. The establishment is altogether *mal monté;* but, if I had more extended means, I could, I think, do myself good in the way of experiment. You know my old principle of always trying my success; so that, as I admit one or two of the presentable people to my confidence, we make an extremely agreeable committee of taste. One thing I would suggest to you: — should you hear of any situation which you think may suit, that you should altogether sink my ever having been here professionally. Date back from the Duke's; and remember, since I left his grace, I have been in Worcestershire for the benefit of my health.

"Keep me in mind, and believe me always

"yours, WALTER FISHER.

"P. S. — There is one remark, by way of note, in M. Ude's book, at page 412, under the head 'coffee,' which has made him extremely unpopular in the lower departments of sundry establishments; of course it affects nothing above the servants' hall, and therefore matters little: but, after recommending his readers to buy a certain description of coffee biggin, he says, — 'If it is the first time of using it, you had better make a little coffee in it *for the servants*, to season it; for, when first used, coffee-biggins *generally smell of turpentine.*' This, I am told, has created a strong sensation."

There are still many more epistles to open and read; but, however amusing their contents might prove, we must restrain our curiosity. What have been submitted are enough to throw a perfect light upon the state of affairs at Sadgrove, and to justify even the most censorious in their opinions of worldly friendships and the sincerities of society.

CHAPTER II.

The 3rd of April has been so frequently before the eye of the reader, as the date of the letters which have been submitted to his perusal, that it will not require much calculation to ascertain that when the party, still lingering at Sadgrove, assembled at breakfast on the 10th, a week had elapsed since the despatch of that heterogeneous packet into which he has been permitted to pry.

It may easily be conceived that seven days' fermentation of such materials had produced something. Magnus had arrived; the Bembridges, aunt and niece, were gone; but Lady Mary Sanderstead remained, and, *mirabile dictu!* Lord Harry Martingale remained too. The attorney had winged his flight to town; Harvie and Blocksford were yet at anchor.

It was about half-past twelve o'clock, and the breakfast-party still lingering in inaction, when the Sadgrove bag arrived, and all its members were, of course, anxious and delighted to hear from their dear friends, and enjoy the fruits of that intercourse, the merits and sincerity of which they have themselves so satisfactorily established in the mind of the reader. Helen, of all of these, was however most affected by the event; and, in order to conceal the emotion which her efforts to stifle her feelings had excited, rushed from the room before she had half finished the letter which she had first opened.

Mortimer followed her to her boudoir, where he found her violently agitated, and in tears.

"What is the matter, Helen dear?" said he.

"Mortimer," sobbed the weeping wife, "my poor father is dying,—he is, he is!"—and, as she spoke these words, she felt that, when *he* was gone, she should be in the wide world alone, without one friend upon whom she could rely for counsel or advice. In mind and sentiment her husband, even now, was a stranger to her.

"What does he say?" asked Mortimer.

"He!" said Helen,—"oh, dear, dear father, *he* can say nothing! — he is past writing to me! — he is gone from me, —perhaps at this moment! — my only parent that I ever knew, who loved me beyond himself! She tells me that he constantly repeats my name, — calls on me, — prays for me!"

"My dearest Helen," said Mortimer, "in Heaven's name, if you wish it, why not go to him? You have hinted such a desire two or three times within the last few days; but the worst of it is, you never speak out. You know your will is law here. Do you wish to go to him?"

"Oh! Mortimer," said Helen, "do not ask me: the choice is one of pain and peril. I dread the alternative. He wishes to see me; that wish is enough to overcome all other feelings of mine: but I would rather — I can do no good — I would rather recollect him, as I last saw him, in all the gaiety of his kindness and good-humour, — than have impressed upon my mind the eternal recollection of his

beloved countenance — changed by the heavy hand of sickness, — perhaps of death! — And if he *were* dead when I reached town! — Oh, no, no, no; I couldn't bear it!"

"Do as you will, dearest," said Mortimer, with a look and in a tone which perfectly conveyed his personal indifference as to the election she made. "I know enough of the sort of feeling which agitates you now, to question whether you had better not wait the result, and" ——

"The result!" said Helen, — "then he *is* to die! — and if he asks for me, — if he calls upon my name, and I am not there, and they tell me of it hereafter, my heart will break, — it will, Mortimer, it will!"

And she clasped his neck, and hid her face on his bosom, and her tears flowed again in torrents.

Was hers a heart to wound? — was she a wife to scorn and suspect?

"Why not go then?" said Mortimer.

"How can we leave our friends?" said Helen.

"*We* need not leave them," cried Mortimer;

"I may remain. What on earth can prevent your starting for London two hours hence? Take your maid and a footman; and, if you dislike travelling at night, sleep at Oxford or at Henley on the road, and start again in the morning."

"And leave my children," said Helen, "and go without *you?*"

"*I*," said Mortimer, "could not well leave home; I have a dread, too, of such scenes: and besides, — that uncle of yours! — in fact, I feel that I should rather be in your way. That you should feel towards your poor dear father as you do, is not only natural, but perfectly right and just: the case is different with *me.*"

Helen could not help thinking that the readiness with which Mortimer gave his sanction to her solitary journey, was not quite in accordance with that sensitive tenderness which she had always fancied, before marriage, was characteristic of the fond, devoted husband: but her enthusiasm had been frequently damped before; and, as her whole heart and soul were

engaged in the anxiety to see her beloved father before he died, she grasped at the possibility of realizing her wish at all hazards and all risk of discomfort and inconvenience.

"If it were not for the children," said Helen ——

"Why," said Mortimer, as if the thought had that moment stricken him for the first time, "if you feel anxious about *them*, Mitcham might stay with them, and you might"——

"No," said Helen, but without even thinking beyond the one object, "I could not do without Mitcham."

"Faith!" said Mortimer, with one of those gloomy smiles which so frequently played over his countenance, "I believe you ladies have as much difficulty in changing a maid as a monarch has in changing his minister."

"But," said Helen, "I have no option: I have no other person at hand to take her place. No: the dear babes have their nurses; and you, my beloved Mortimer, are equally devoted to them with myself."

"Yes," said Mortimer, exceedingly angry

at something which Helen could not even surmise, although the reader perhaps may, "I will act as head-nurse in your absence."

"I wish, Francis," said Helen,—"devoutly wish, that I could persuade you to go."

"What!" said Mortimer, with another of those looks which cut her to the heart, "and leave the dear children entirely to the tender mercies of the servants!"

"I know," said Helen, "the fatal, yet natural, dislike you have taken to my uncle; still"——

"Helen," said Mortimer, "do not talk of him to me: *you* hate him as much as I do; and nothing is so abominable as a hypocritical avowal of affection for near relations for whom one does not care sixpence. That you should desire to see your father, as he desires that you should, is, as I have already stated, most natural. My advice is this: it is impossible that you can get clear of Sadgrove before three o'clock; do what I before suggested; — go on as far as Oxford, rest yourself there; start early in the morn-

ing, and you will be in Grosvenor Street before noon."

This plan exactly accorded with poor Helen's wishes; but the more and the more calmly her husband discussed it, the more her heart sank within her; because, in the philosophical manner in which he treated it, and the readiness he evinced to accede to her wish, and even went into the details of the journey, she perceived fresh evidence of his total indifference, not only as to her presence or absence, but as to the fate of her beloved parent, which had so often before agonized her.

"We are reduced to a very small party here," said Mortimer; "and although Frank Blocksford will, no doubt, miss you, Lady Mary will not, if Harry remains. Magnus will endeavour to amuse the young gentleman, and Harvie and I will make it out remarkably well. I suppose you will not stay till the funeral."

Helen felt herself choking: she was unable to speak, — to look at her husband, who, in one sentence, had, as *we* know, intentionally

inflicted a thousand wounds. The allusion to Francis Blocksford at such a moment; the triumphant announcement that the (to *her*) odious Magnus was to take charge of that youth; the inference that he sanctioned under his roof, and in the society of his wife, such a *liaison* as all the world, except Helen, understood to be existing between Lady Mary and Lord Harry — never brought to entire perfection till Lord Harry's father had made successful interest, at his persuasion, with the Admiralty to get her ladyship's husband a ship on a foreign station, for the command of which he was about as fit as the coxswain of the Lord Mayor's barge in a voyage from Blackfriar's Bridge to Strand-on-the-Green would be to navigate the Red Sea in a seventy-four. As for the service, that was one thing; as to society, that was another: all that was wanted was Sanderstead's absence from home; and, as the motive was duly appreciated, the Mediterranean was thought the safest pond for him to play about in; and so thither he was sent.

But if these hints and innuendoes, — first,

as to Francis Blocksford, which Helen felt, however undeserved they were; and next, as to the sort of society which her husband, for their own objects, encouraged under his roof, — irritated and wounded her, the way in which he spoke of the certainty of a fatal result to her father's illness was still more painful. We, who have seen Mortimer's letters, and know the dreadful character of his thoughts and suspicions, can duly appreciate the tone and spirit of his remarks, sweetened and softened in manner, and even *that* equivocal: but it would be hard, indeed, to give any adequate description of his unhappy wife's feelings, when she heard him consign to the grave, as if it were a matter of course, the father she adored, and the man with whom he had himself lived for years, upon terms of perfect intimacy and worldly friendship.

The course Mortimer adopted determined her as to that which she should take. If he had followed up the line upon which she had at first set out, and strengthened her in her view that it would hereafter be more consolatory to

look back upon her father as she had last seen him, than to have impressed upon her mind for ever, his image stretched on the bed of death, she might, fearing that all would be over when she arrived in town, have relinquished the journey, and have waited the event at Sadgrove; but the moment that she found her unqualified love for her parent scoffed at, — the certainty of his immediate dissolution established, — and the whole affair, nearest to her heart, treated as a matter of indifference, her filial love was roused beyond control, and she decided, in a tone much more of command than she was generally accustomed to assume, upon undertaking the journey as soon as it was possible to begin it.

"Women are strange creatures!" said Mortimer. "Well, I will order the carriage to be at the door at three; you will get to Oxford by nine or ten: there I advise you to sleep. If you prefer it, you can get on to Henley; but, at all events, stop there, because you will save the fatigue of a long journey, and arrive in town at any early hour you choose

to-morrow, which will be infinitely more convenient than getting to Grosvenor Street in the middle of the night."

"I care for nothing," said Helen, "but reaching home in time to see my dearest father."

"Home!" said Mortimer, — "ha, ha! So, then, your heart has never been at home here, Helen!"

It drives one half-mad to hear such things said, and at such a time, by a man like Mortimer, to such a being as Helen. She heeded them not, and only said,—

"I call my father's house my home; surely, dear love, there is no harm in *that*."

"Harm!" said Mortimer, "oh dear, there is no harm in anything you say, Helen! But there, I had better give orders about the carriage, and have horses sent for:—and you take Mitcham then, of course?"

"Of course," said Helen.

"Which of the footmen shall go—your own or Richard?" said Mortimer. "I ask only because Richard, I think, is the steadiest."

"Do whatever you like, dear Mortimer,"

said Helen. "I shall be ready at three, and I do assure you I thank you a thousand times for letting me go; although I would thank you ten thousand times more if you would go with me."

"Ay," said Mortimer, "that is quite another affair. Well, then, I shall go down and announce your projected departure, and make all necessary arrangements. Let us, however, first look at the babes; I promise, Helen, to take the greatest care of them during your absence."

Helen, too much delighted to be associated with her husband in such a labour of love, felt grateful to Heaven that it had bestowed on them children, who seemed to form the only real solid link which bound them together.

They proceeded to the nursery, which opened into Helen's dressing-room; and as Mortimer gently pushed open the door, Helen following, his eye glanced upon Francis Blocksford, who, the moment he heard the rattling of the lock, was evidently making a hasty retreat from the apartment. The nurse was there, but not Miss Mitcham.

In one moment the fitful smile which had gilded Mortimer's countenance was turned into a look of the deadliest gloom; and an oath, muttered not quite so softly as to pass unheard by his wife, escaped his lips. In an instant the children, and everything else in the world except the object of his suspicion, was forgotten.

"Wasn't that Mr. Blocksford who went out?" said Mortimer to the nurse.

"Yes, sir," said the woman; "he generally looks in as he goes by to see the dear children."

Mortimer spoke not for a moment; then, turning to Helen, his countenance quivering with emotion, he said,—

"If Francis has ascertained that they are well, I conclude that I need not enquire after them myself. I 'll go and see about the carriage."

And, suiting the action to the word, away he went with an affected carelessness and gaiety of manner, leaving Helen in a state of surprise and misery, which, however, were greatly modified by her one thought of the impending

calamity which, under all circumstances, seemed to her to be fraught with the most important consequences: and so in truth it was; but we must not anticipate.

Little need be said, after what has already been disclosed, to convince the reader that Helen, under the fearful circumstances by which she was surrounded, had a worse chance of coming out unscathed from her trials, than even the innocent queen after her walk over the hot plough-shares.

"Rely upon it," said Magnus to Mortimer, when he reached his own room, and imparted what he had seen as to the evanishment of Blocksford, "the case is a bad one. To a person like myself, my dear friend, accustomed to view things on the great scale, and to whom matters of first-rate importance are confided, the underhanded trickeries of small men are immediately evident; of course, when I say small men, in the present case I mean men of small experience. I say again, the case is a bad one: rely upon it, that sort of open-necked, guitar-playing, song-singing, sketch-

making, poem-writing person, at his age, is the most dangerous in the world."

"That is all true," said Mortimer; "but Helen"——

"Helen!" said Magnus, — "Helen married you, as you know, out of pique. Did not that father of hers"——

"Stay," said Mortimer, "he was our friend; he is dying."

"That is in the course of nature," said Magnus; "but did he not actually send after you to Brighton?"

"All that is past," said Mortimer: "I speak only of the present."

"Well then, for the present," said Magnus, "Mr. Blocksford is too much here,—infinitely too much, especially after having once excited the feelings you so fervently described in your last letter to me. I have watched, — carefully watched, the workings of his mind: I have seen an interchange of looks between them: her spirits have sunk in due gradation with his: — he is in love."

"In what a position do I stand!" said Mor-

timer. "How am I to act? — what am I to do? A word, — a hint, — a doubt expressed, would fire the train: — at this juncture, too, while Helen is oppressed with grief for her father!"

"There is a good deal of acting in that, I take it," said Magnus. "I speak out, because you desire me to do so, and because I would guard you against deception. May she not assume a greater degree of sorrow for her father's illness, in order to cloak the real cause of her depression? May she not seek the journey to avoid the scrutinizing gaze with which she must be conscious I watch her actions? She is conscious of *that*, I know; and" ——

"And, after all, we may be wrong,—unjust," said Mortimer, relentingly. "However, at this period, nothing can be said or done in the affair. She is plunged in grief, and her filial feelings must be respected. If, in her absence, Francis could be spoken to, — told that people remark his familiarity, — his constant residence here, — his recent depression: *I* couldn't touch upon the point, but a friend might."

"A friend *will*," said Magnus. "You have put this affair into my hands: I am resolved to maintain your honour. While Helen is away, I will draw young Blocksford, as you call him"——

"Hush, hush!" said Mortimer.

"I will draw him, I say, into conversation, and lead it to the topic on which I propose to descant. He has honoured me by taking a fancy to my society, — a family failing, — and, I think, is inclined to place reliance on me. I will discourse him gently upon the great caution necessary to be observed in society by attractive young men in their intimate friendships with young married women: in fact, I will advise him whilst I search his mind, and, as I find the fact to be, so shall I act; and if—as I have little doubt I shall—I should be able, from the ingenuousness of nineteen or twenty,"——

"More than that," said Mortimer; "he was of age yesterday. I did not touch upon the point, although I recollected it well; nor did he, which I own surprised me."

"There must have been some reason for *that*," said the amiable Magnus: "however, twenty or twenty-one, I flatter myself I shall come at something like the truth: and then, if in his confessions there should appear anything to justify your natural suspicions, — not as to himself, but as to her,—I will suggest, as a matter of honour to him, his making some excuse for immediately leaving Sadgrove, which, while Mrs. Mortimer is absent, will be less noticeable, and stop the matter in time to avoid all the fatal effects of *éclat*."

"Excellent councillor!" said Mortimer: "you can, indeed, do all this, and I may be saved,—Helen may be saved. I may, perhaps, be restored to tranquillity even by the very course of examination to which you propose to submit him: it may all be innocence and"——

"It *may*," said Magnus. "Trust to me: it requires a grasp of mind to take these subjects into one great general view."

"But," said Mortimer, "let me implore, let me entreat, let me conjure you, by no implication, no allusion, no suggestion, permit

the slightest hint to fall from your lips which could lead the thoughts of this dreaded object of my solicitude to the fact of our wretched consanguinity. I was mad — I was raving mad when I permitted his mother to force him thus upon me: and yet, Magnus, I am not lost to all natural feeling. If I dare own the truth to *him*;—but no, no!—there falls his mother's reputation! —there perishes his respect for her whom he now loves! Oh! my friend, this is all just retribution; it is all as it should be. Let then the sinful suffer, but let us save the innocent, — if innocent yet they be; and spare the Countess degradation and disgrace, and keep her son from a knowledge of" ——

"My dear Mortimer," said Magnus, bending his body gracefully forward, and grasping from his ample box a "gigantic pinch of snuff," "do you suspect me of any *gaucherie* like *that?*"

"I think," said Mortimer, — (and it is wonderful to see how much the man condescends who, to use Mr. Wilkins' expression in his letter to his brother, goes down stairs to make a

confidence,) — "I think, from what I have heard, that all may yet be well; that the extremest point to which our charges can go is indiscretion: — but the state of doubt"—

"Shall be ended forthwith," said Magnus. "Leave the affair to me. Rely upon it, this journey to London is a providential occurrence, and we will take advantage of it. You go see all the preparations made for the lady's departure; stifle your feelings; check yourself if you feel inclined to abruptness; seem as kind as ever. Remember, we have yet but slight grounds to go upon; let the fault of harshness not rest upon *you*. I will go with you, and take my share in the ceremonies of the day."

If one did not know that all this was true, and had happened, would it be believed that a man of Mortimer's sense and spirit—of Mortimer's high breeding and knowledge of the world—could have consented to talk with any other man, no matter whom, upon such a subject and in such a strain? — that jealousy, — and that most peculiar jealousy of others, originating, as we have already seen, in diffidence

of himself, — could so far have debased his mind, and changed the nature of his feelings, as to have thrown him into the power of two such persons as Colonel Magnus, the mightiest of his friends, and Mr. Wilkins, the meanest and most subservient of his domestics?

So it was; and, after what we have seen and read, it is quite clear that the efforts of the subordinate, whose association in the league against his wife Mortimer never mentioned to Magnus, were in no degree inferior to those of his more important, although unconscious, confederate.

Mortimer, who seemed to have placed himself implicitly under the tutelage of his exemplary friend, acceded to all his suggestions as they related to his apparently attentive and affectionate superintendence of the proceedings connected with Helen's departure; and the Orestes and Pylades of Sadgrove joined the half-disjointed, half-expectant party, who, unsettled by the announcement of their fair hostess's departure under such painful circumstances, considered it absolutely necessary at least to

postpone their arrangements for the day's diversions till she was fairly out of sight, their tone of sorrow being taken from their host, who merely regretted that Helen's feelings prompted her to make the journey which, from the contents of her mother-in-law's letter, he felt assured would be too late to secure the object she had in view.

And, while all this worldly scene was acting below, what was passing in the neighbourhood of that nursery which had been the scene of so many whispering interviews between Francis and Mary Mitcham, and out of which so many materials for mischief had been collected.

Francis Blocksford no sooner heard of Helen's projected expedition to London, than he resolved that the crisis of his fate was at hand. Mary was going with her: the thought of her departure, painful as it was of itself, was coupled in his mind with the certainty of losing her eternally. Left alone with her mistress, the secret would be betrayed. Won by Helen's kindness, and melted by sympathy for her grief, she would own to her the whole

history of their attachment. The idea was madness. His heart and mind were filled with the one thought: his head ached,—his limbs trembled,—his hands were icy cold,—his eyes burned: see her he must. Five, six, seven times did he make errands for himself to his apartment upon the staircase, which led, as we already know, also to the nursery and to Mary Mitcham's room: he saw her not. He would have stricken some chords on his guitar to attract her attention, but that Helen was weeping and in sorrow. Again he paced the passage, and not again in vain: at length he met the object of his search and solicitude.

"Mary, Mary!" said he, in a tremulous voice, scarcely articulate, his tongue cleaving to his mouth,—"for Heaven's sake! Mary, one moment."

Mary shook her head, and, laying her finger on her lip, passed on. He re-entered his room, —affected to look for some book or paper,— sat down as if to write,—*did* write, and the tremulousness of his hand came out afterwards in evidence against him. Again Mary passed

his door, or would have done so; but, maddened by the thoughts which, we know, occupied his mind, he drew her into the room, and closed it.

"Hear me, Mary," said he, clasping her to his heart: "I am this day my own master, ready and resolved to redeem my pledge,—ready, too, to fulfil my promise made to you. You love me, and you have owned it: the crisis of my fate has arrived. You leave this with Helen in an hour. If you go with *her* to London, if you see your mother there, you will consult her upon this attachment of ours,—for we both love, Mary—she will give you worldly reasons why you should tell Helen, and take her advice; she will tell Mortimer; Mortimer will tell *my* mother, and we are lost!—and, by Heavens! Mary, unless you wish to have my blood upon your head"——

"Oh! Mr. Blocksford," said Mary, trembling like a leaf, "don't speak so loud! I hear Mrs. Mortimer in the passage: let me go, for Heaven's sake!—If you *do* care for me, let me go!"

"Care for you, Mary!" said Francis,—"what words are these? Listen, listen: now, be calm,—be still! love,—be still! This journey gives us the opportunity of all others to be sought for:—there's nobody coming, love! Hear me: Helen stops to sleep at Oxford to-night; when she is gone to rest, you will be free. I will be there; a chaise shall be ready to receive you, and we will start thence to Scotland, where you will become mine for ever. Thence we will return, and the knot once tied, my mother, I know, will forget and forgive all; and if she do not, dearest, I have, as I have already told you, a fortune adequate to all our wants and wishes; and if she refuse her sanction to our marriage, I am content to possess your love, even if her future hatred is entailed upon me."

Mary, dreadfully agitated, said nothing, but left her hand clasped in that of Francis; at length the word "Impossible!" passed her lips.

"Mary," said Francis, drawing her still closer to his heart, "the moment has arrived:—do you hate,—do you detest me?"

"No, no!" said Mary, bursting into tears, "why should I?"

"Then," said Francis, scarcely able to give the question utterance, "do you love me, Mary?"

Her hand remained clasped in his: the grasp was not relaxed.

"Let me go, Francis, — pray, let me go," said the trembling girl.

"Francis," whispered Blocksford to himself, — "she calls me Francis!"

"Mary," said he, "in a hurried yet resolute tone, "I trust you, — I rely upon you, — at twelve to-night at Oxford! I shall easily find out at which inn you stop. At twelve! — for Heaven's sake, do not deceive me!"

Mary decidedly pressed his hand, and rushed out of the room. Blocksford threw himself upon the sofa, and hid his eyes: — was it a dream? — was it reality? Did he, in truth, possess the treasure he had so ardently sought; or, at least, was it so immediately within his grasp. It seemed like a bright vision; but his delight, even in the moment of

triumph, was accompanied with a sensation of dread at his long hoped-for success. The instant he felt himself secure, there arose in his mind a crowd of thoughts which had never before entered it, — cares, responsibilities, and a thousand incidents, involving even the details of the expedition. As far as these were concerned, he resolved, lest he should have no other opportunity of enlightening the fair companion of his intended excursion, to write a note, which he would convey to her as she was starting, which would ensure the success of the adventure; and accordingly, with as much composure as he was master of, he scrawled these lines:

"It is natural, dearest, that your feelings should be deeply affected at this moment; and I own that nothing but my conviction that this is an opportunity not to be lost, would have induced me to be so peremptory; but, as you have made me the happiest of happy men, few words may save us much trouble. Whether you stop at 'The Star' or

'The Angel,' of course I shall know: trust to me for the rest, and fear nothing: I, of course, have plenty of *friends* in Oxford, and at either house. I believe, knowing your kind and tender heart, that parting from the dear children will give you the severest pang of all; but you must not let that feeling get the better of those which you own I have inspired. Heaven bless you! Before this time to-morrow we shall be safe from the persecutions of all spies and enemies. Remember, — twelve!

"Ever yours,

"F. B."

He might, however, have spared himself this little address; for, his door being still ajar, his ears were delighted with a soft, short cough, which he recognized to be that of his Mary, and which was of a character to which the Faculty have assigned no particular designation. He started up: sure enough Mary was there.

"Go down, — pray, go down!" said she. "Mrs. Mortimer is gone down already; they

are just going to luncheon: if you stay away, we shall be discovered. I shall die! Oh! pray, think better of it! — some other time!"

"No, no, no!" said Francis, "you have promised. Mind, I shall be there: somebody will give you notice: — it will be all right, rely upon it."

"There, then, go now, for Heaven's sake!" said Mary. "Oh! what on earth will become of me!"

"Luncheon is ready, sir," said Mr. Wilkins, who had taken upon himself a new character upon this special occasion, and fatigued himself to volunteer the announcement, for what purpose Francis did not exactly understand, but Mary did. Blocksford said, "Very well," with an extremely ill-acted carelessness; and Miss Mitcham looked upon the house-steward, as she felt, for the last time, with a scorn and contempt in which there was no acting at all.

"Upon my word! my dear Mrs. Mortimer," said Lady Mary, "you are undertaking a great performance, — a journey of a hundred and twenty miles, alone!"

"Oh! nothing," said Helen, "when the heart is interested; besides, in these days of civilization, a lone lady is not likely to meet with many perilous adventures, while protected by the presence of her maid and a man-servant and two postillions."

"Upon my honour!" said Lord Harry, "I do think one of us ought to offer himself as cavalier, for I am quite sure that our being here prevents Mortimer's going with you."

"No," said Mortimer; "Helen knows my reasons for wishing her to leave me behind. I should, I assure you, make no ceremony, if that were not the case; nor need our both going at all disturb you so long as Colonel Magnus and Mr. Blocksford are here: they know the ways of the house, and are quite capable, either one or the other, to be my *locum tenens*."

"Why, what on earth is the matter with *you*, Frank?" said Captain Harvie to Francis, as he took his "seat at the board."

"Matter!" said Blocksford, — "nothing is the matter with *me*."

"Did you ever see anybody looking as *he* does, Mrs. Mortimer?" said the Captain.

"Come," said Francis, "don't worry me; I want some luncheon."

"Your hand is not over steady," said Magnus, casting a significant look at Mortimer; — "what has flurried you?"

"Nothing," said Francis, colouring crimson.

"Umph!" said Mortimer, whose glance at Magnus Helen saw; and too quickly guessing its import, — too well knowing the cause of her arch-enemy's hatred, —*her* cheek, pale as death before, caught the infection, and fired with rage. This really inconsequential, but unfortunate exhibition, was not lost upon Lady Mary or her friends, who all exchanged looks, none of which were lost upon Mortimer.

The struggle with her contending feelings was too much for poor Helen, who burst into tears, and quitted the table. Mortimer did not follow her; Lady Mary did, — for she knew enough of *all* the history to pity, although her great delight was only to alarm her. The carriage was shortly brought to

the door; and then the wretched husband — for what else was he? — proceeded to his still more wretched wife to announce its arrival.

During the incidental preparations for the departure, Magnus watched poor Francis like a lynx: he hoped, in the activity of his *surveillance*, to pick up some of those "trifles light as air," upon which he might give something like a colouring to the suspicions he had all along endeavoured to awaken in Mortimer's mind; and he was most fortunate: for poor Francis, the very first day after he had legally arrived at years of discretion, having done, perhaps, — at least in a worldly point of view, — the most indiscreet thing he possibly could do, was in a state of nervous agitation far beyond the Colonel's most sanguine hopes. Full of the anticipation, — not of his future life, for that was by far too remote an object for his young and sanguine mind, — but of his arrangements for the day and night, and the journey, and the marriage; and of the thought that she who was to be the partner of his existence, the sharer of his fate and

fortunes, was to be, before his eyes, packed up in the rumble of a carriage in a hot day, with a huge plush-wearing footman, who, because the seat was so narrow, would, for mere convenience sake, in all probability carry his arm round the slender waist of his fair companion. What must have passed in his mind? Magnus recommended an extra glass of wine after luncheon; but Francis refused it, and exhibited signs of peevishness and irritability when the Colonel joked him in *his* way, which had never been previously observable in his manner: — all of which convinced the said sage Colonel that he was doing wonders in the way of discovery-making.

The time fast approached for poor Helen's departure. Her parting with her children, whom she loved better than life, and from whom she had never yet been separated, was, indeed, a trial; and Mary Mitcham was so much affected by the scene, that Mortimer went the length of taking her hand, and begging her not to agitate herself, — that she would see them again in a few days, — perhaps two or

three; at which remark the poor girl burst into a fresh torrent of tears, and Helen wept more than before; and in this fashion the lady of Sadgrove took her leave.

She leant on Mortimer's arm as she passed through the hall, and bowed her *adieux* to the few guests left, for she could not speak; and when she was seated in the carriage, and the door was about to be closed, she motioned with her hand that Mitcham should accompany her inside; and this mark of her consideration — not altogether unselfish — threw poor Francis into a new fit of terror. Mary was to be left *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Mortimer for six or seven hours, on the eve of the deciding movement of her life, — and that movement to be made in conjunction with so near and dear a friend of the family: — was it possible that she could play the hypocrite so well as to conceal this important — most important fact from her who had been so unboundedly kind to her? He doubted, — he dreaded, — and would have almost preferred the rumble and plush, with his arm round

her waist into the bargain, to the powerful influence of such a woman as Helen over such a girl as Mary in the way of inducing a confidence: but he might have spared himself all his anxiety. Mary never let fall either remark or observation which could in the remotest degree lead her mistress to suspect anything more than she always had suspected, namely, that Frank thought Mary an extremely pretty girl, as indeed did everybody else; and that he had told her so, as indeed Frank, in his frequent conversations with Helen about her, had confessed. Mary's only remark upon the subject during the whole journey, which was at all to the point, was,—"that Mr. Blocksford was a remarkably nice young gentleman, and she wished him all sorts of happiness."

They are, however, gone; and while they are on their journey, at least as far as Oxford, we shall have plenty of occupation in watching the proceedings of other and very different people.

CHAPTER III.

It would be difficult adequately to describe the different feelings of the different persons who witnessed Helen's departure from the door of Sadgrove. Mortimer resolved to make use of the period of her absence in endeavouring to satisfy himself by all means, fair and unfair, of the justice or groundlessness of his long-cherished suspicions. Wilkins, his creature, determined to avail himself of the same opportunity to confirm those suspicions; while Magnus, whose disappointed pretensions to Helen's favour had rendered her doubly hateful to him, proposed to himself to discuss the subject with Blocksford only just so far as might strengthen him in the belief of her attachment to *him*, if he found the feeling of affection for her really there, — in order,

by the results, to realize the anticipations of Mortimer, the hopes of Wilkins, and the schemes of Mr. Brimmer Brassey, by again breaking up the establishment at Sadgrove, and thus reducing its master to a state of single blessedness, consequent upon a separation from his wife; in which position Magnus, with his satellite, the attorney, would have him as completely under their control as he had formerly been, when Magnus had, in earlier days, involved him in all the misfortunes, except one, which had debased his character, and destroyed his peace of mind.

Magnus knew Mortimer's failing,— his leading, ruling passion, it might be called,— the morbid sensibility which the consciousness of his own demerits had excited in his heart and mind, and which, as we already know, could be roused to something like positive madness by the belief (which more or less continually existed in different degrees) that he was despised, not only by the world, but by Helen herself; and with the knowledge of her character

which the reader has, in the course of his perusal of these pages, probably obtained, and which Magnus completely possessed, neither the one nor the other could be at a loss to perceive that the mode of treatment which Mortimer adopted to uphold his fair fame and dignity, was precisely that which was least calculated to produce the desired effect upon his wife, devoted, as she was, to him in the outset of her matrimonial career, warm and affectionate as was her heart, and kind and generous as was her disposition.

Mortimer made no allowance for the innocent gaiety of a girl, — for what else could she be called?—who had been courted, sought, flattered, praised, followed, and cried-up to the skies in the best London society, whom he had suddenly withdrawn from the sphere which she brightened and adorned, into a retirement which she was prepared to enjoy, if the seclusion had been enlivened, as she, in the romance of her mind, had hoped it would be, by the affectionate confidence of the man

she loved, and that interchange of feeling and sentiment to which she had looked forward as the leading charm of a married life.

But, no: she had been disappointed. The total estrangement of the neighbouring gentry on their first arrival at Sadgrove struck her forcibly; for it must be confessed, as, indeed, it already has been, that Helen's notion of retirement included the presence of an agreeable society, although, when she found that circumstances prevented the enjoyment of it, in *her* case, she was the first and readiest to disavow the feeling, and declare her dislike of country visitings. And from whom did she learn the reason of this defection, but from the last woman on earth who ought to have been near her?

Does anybody suppose that Helen, brought up as she had been in the full glare of worldly knowledge, could long continue undeceived as to the nature of the claim — influence we will not call it — which Madam St. Alme asserted at Sadgrove? Even if her own innocence had blinded her to the character of the

intimacy which at some time or other must have existed between Mortimer and the Countess, the amiable activity of her friends was not wanting to enlighten her.

Was it by this association, strenuously insisted upon by Mortimer, that she was to be taught to respect his morals or admire his virtues? Was it by his almost insane destruction of his once favourite retreat, the Fishing-Temple, the chief ornament of his place, because Helen had inadvertently made some remark upon his earlier attachment to it, which he misconstrued into a reproach, that she was to estimate his mildness and moderation? Was it by his marked uncourteous violence, upon more than one occasion, to young Blocksford, for whom Helen entertained feelings of genuine friendship, chiefly excited by the kindness which Mortimer himself generally exhibited towards him, and the interest he appeared to take in his welfare, that he expected to seal her lips or close her eyes, so that she might neither speak to Francis nor look on him? If so, he was wrong, — radically wrong, in his system and

principles. Helen, conscious of her rectitude and the purity of her intentions, would rather increase than diminish her kindness to Francis the moment she found herself wounded and insulted by Mortimer's suspicions; — and so in every case where their tempers clashed.

After the birth of her first child, the boy, she felt that she had a new claim upon Mortimer's affection, and, to do him justice, his attachment to his children was enthusiastic; but still the same gloom hung over him which had before oppressed him: the second, as we know, was a girl, but she never excited so much of his affection as the elder one. The main point he carried, in consequence of these additions to his family, was that of prolonging his stay in Worcestershire, and during one of the three matrimonial years they did not visit London at all.

All this would have suited Helen, because the professing nun at the altar, on the day when her long tresses are shorn from her head, and her glittering ornaments consigned to oblivion, is not more determined to fulfil her vows

than Helen was to assimilate herself to Mortimer's tastes and feelings; but she required in return that confidence and assurance of regard which she knew she merited. • Perhaps, — who knows? — if they had at once proceeded to Sadgrove, and the meeting between them and the St. Almes in France had never taken place, all might have been well: it is, however, now too late to speculate upon possibilities or probabilities, we have to deal with facts; and truth compels us to say, that after the most implicit devotion to Mortimer through a long and serious illness, when, as the reader already has been told, she watched the life-breath quivering on his lip, his earliest remark, when his returning health gave sufficient vigour to his mind to make it, was, that he was afraid his young friend Francis must have missed her society very much.

That *was* a crisis; it was from what then occurred that Mortimer discovered the danger of trifling with his wife's feelings. Her anger at that moment knew no bounds. It was an awful sight to see one so young, so beautiful,

and so inherently good, torn and tortured by rage which amounted to frenzy. Nothing but the dread of causing the cruel man who had inflicted the wound a relapse, prevented her at that moment from flying from Sadgrove to her father: her feelings had way, and a torrent of tears relieved her agony of mind. Mortimer was alarmed,—subdued,—and penitent; and endeavoured to assure his wretched wife that what he said was meant in perfect good-humour. Helen insisted upon it that Francis should never more visit the house; but Mortimer persuaded her into the relinquishment of this condition by again assuring her of the playfulness of his remark, and by pointing out how injudicious it would be to exclude him from their society; a circumstance which would naturally call for explanation, and which, although perfectly absurd in itself, might give some colour to a story to which, in point of fact, there was not the slightest foundation.

So completely did Mortimer live for the world—out of which he had removed him-

self — that the idea of any "history" with which his name was connected getting abroad, agitated him just as much as did the apprehension of the occurrence of anything like "a scene" at home. Peace, upon the present occasion, was restored; but it seems probable that one of the conditions of the treaty was, the exclusion of the Countess from the Sadgrove circle during the following season.

Well, — *revenons à nos moutons*, — Helen is gone. To all eyes, but especially to those of Mortimer and his friend, the extraordinary agitation of Blocksford was evident; and the looks which these two important personages of the drama interchanged during the forenoon were eminently expressive of their thoughts and feelings upon the subject.

"I hope," said Lady Mary Sanderstead, "dear Mrs. Mortimer will meet with no accident or worry on her journey. I am used to travelling alone: if I could not muster courage for *that*, while poor dear Sandy is abroad, I don't know what I should do."

"In these days," said Mortimer, "as I told Helen, there are not many perils to be apprehended."

"Come, Blocksford," said Magnus, "let you and I take a stroll down to the river. Is the fly up yet?"

"I — I"— stammered Francis, "have some letters to write; one to my mother, — and" —

"Dutiful boy!" said Lady Mary, with one of her most captivating looks. "What a charming thing it must be to have such a son! — don't you think so, Mr. Mortimer?"

"Delightful!" replied the master of Sadgrove, not quite master of himself, inasmuch as he knew enough of Lady Mary Sanderstead to know that she seldom wasted her words, or said anything without some meaning."

"I hope," said Magnus, "that when *his* boy grows to be of the same age as Mr. Blocksford, he will be equally dutiful, and that we shall be all alive to see it."

"Is the Countess coming over?" said Lady Mary carelessly to Francis, knowing perfectly well that she was *not*.

"I really don't know," said Francis, perfectly convinced at the same moment that she had not the slightest intention of doing any such thing.

It would be a waste of time to linger long over these minor manifestations of worldly feelings, while so much of real importance to all parties most immediately concerned is impending. The amusements of the day went on as usual, and, as we have seen, Helen was not much missed. At the accustomed period the carriages, the horses, and everything else which contributed to make up the amusements of the morning, were all at the door, as usual; even while poor Helen was travelling from scenes of gaiety, in which her heart reposed not, to those of grief and sorrow, in which it was so deeply engaged. What then? Lady Mary, when seated in her delightful little carriage, with the two fat, long-tailed ponies, which she loved to drive before her, and Lord Harry, whom she loved to lead, by her side, thought no more of, and cared no more for, the weeping Helen, than she did

—let me take care of what I say,—for the veteran Captain Sanderstead, with the cocoa-nut head, who was pottering about in the Mediterranean, and whom she had married only because he was next but one in remainder to an earldom, blessed, as many an earldom is not, with an adequate fortune for its maintenance.

To anybody else there might have arisen some difficulty, as being the only lady left at Sadgrove;—not so to Lady Mary: she could not go to the Fogburys before a certain day, and she had nowhere else to go to in the intermediate time. In a woman of spirit, there is nothing like independence; and the moment she establishes a character for that truly English quality, she may, of course, do what she likes. Having dropped a few "*natural*" tears for Helen's misfortunes, she soon resumed her wonted gaiety, and volunteered the command of the house, which Mortimer, with one of his sweetest smiles, accorded her; and so she was installed accordingly. The inability of the Fogburys to receive her exactly on the

day which she selected, she was compelled to endure the society of Colonel Magnus, whose presence was rendered doubly hateful to her by the consciousness that he was a universal spy,—a watchman-general of everything that was going on; still, as the evil was irremediable, she resolved to fasten herself upon the master of the house during her brief stay, in order, if possible, to divert the attention of the lynx from the *liaison* which had been notorious,—even in the newspapers,—for many years.

All her ladyship's gaiety and playfulness, however, went but a little way to divert Mortimer's attention from the marked abstraction of Blocksford. His almost sharp refusal of Magnus's invitation to walk; even his evasive answer about his mother's visit to England,—a new proof of his powers of dissimulation,—struck deeply into Mortimer's mind; and every succeeding ten minutes of the period in which Frank remained in his presence, added to the conviction on his mind that Helen's

departure was the cause of the unquestionable alteration in his conduct and manner.

N'importe was the motto,—and away went Lady Mary and Lord Harry in the pony phaeton,—away cantered Harvie,—and away rode together Mortimer and Magnus,—Francis having, for the first time, declined their society. What the conversation — what the surmises of the two friends might have been, far be it from us even to conjecture. All that is necessary for us to know is, that having enjoyed —(what sort of enjoyment it was can best be appreciated by reading in the magazines or newspapers of some respectable gentleman just deceased, who for many years had *enjoyed* an exceedingly bad state of health,) — their itinerant *tête-à-tête*, they returned to the house, where matters went on much as usual till dinner-time.

The effects produced by the first tocsin are not evident or visible: but when, upon this special occasion, the second had been rung, and the extra ten minutes' law had been given, and dinner was actually announced, and no Mr. Francis Blocksford appeared, great, indeed,

was the consternation of the master of Sadgrove. Nobody knew when or whither the young gentleman had gone: Mortimer was fearfully agitated; Lady Mary, however, preferring her soup to the suggestions which were made by divers and sundry persons in and of the household as to his destination, said, with one of the sweetest simpers into which her brightly-vermilioned lips could twist themselves, — "I really don't think it either fair or hospitable to make such very urgent enquiries after a gentleman of Frank's age."

The mystery in which his sudden departure was involved was exceedingly amusing to Lady Mary, to Lord Harry Martingale, and to Captain Harvie; it was not at all unpleasing to the magnificent Magnus; but it was torture to the master of Sadgrove.

Not a sound that could reach the dinner-room fell upon his ears but he hoped it might be somehow connected with the return of Francis. He sat and talked, and even smiled, but the extraordinary disappearance of this hated — yet naturally loved — rival was an

event against which he could not successfully rally; and Lady Mary being the only lady left, and being not at all anxious to immure herself in the drawing-room alone to wait the "coming men," she lingered longer than usual at the dinner-table, until her stay seemed to Mortimer eternal, so anxious was he to make some further enquiries after the missing guest.

At length her ladyship quitted her seat at the board, and Mortimer, excusing himself to the men, hastened to his own room, whither he instantly summoned the trusty Wilkins, — as, indeed, Wilkins was perfectly well assured he would. From his evidence, delivered, as the reader may easily imagine, in the manner best calculated to give it point, and tend to produce the effects by which he hoped to aggrandize himself, Mortimer gathered that Blocksford had ordered one of the saddle-horses, — Mortimer's horses! — and having first despatched a boy with his "carpet-bag," — in all probability to Worcester, — had told the groom who brought out the horse, that, if he did not return that evening, the

boy who had taken the bag could bring the said horse back to Sadgrove.

"The boy with the horse is not returned?" said Mortimer.

"No, sir," said Wilkins, "I believe not; — but — I — should think it very improbable that Mr. Blocksford will be back to-night."

"Why?" said Mortimer; "what are your reasons for thinking so?"

"I don't *know*, sir," said Wilkins; "but"—

Now the villain *did* know; he knew, as certainly as *we* do, that Francis Blocksford's departure from Sadgrove was consequent upon Mary Mitcham's journey towards London; and, although he did *not* know the particulars of the arrangement for carrying Frank's mad scheme into execution, he could in one instant have relieved Mortimer's mind from the growing anxiety with which it was tortured, and, by the mere mention of the girl's name, have diverted his thoughts into another channel, and saved that which might have been a happy family from misery. But that was not *his* game: he was playing for the ruin of

old Crawley, and the possession of his vacant stewardship; and the fellow had the hardihood to thank Providence for having afforded him so speedy, so unexpected, and so sure an opportunity of gaining his point.

Shakspeare, who has better said than anybody all that can be said of the passion of jealousy, has described its workings so minutely, that it would be as vain as useless to expatiate upon its power over Mortimer. For months, — nay years, — he had been brooding over the one subject which had so long since taken possession of his mind. That he had subdued his feelings, — or at least the expression of them, — generally speaking, is true; but the feelings were still at work: and now that he connected the disappearance of Francis with the excursion of Helen, so far from being surprised at the result, he seemed to consider it what he might have expected; and, in that mood, scarcely repented that he had not sooner interfered to terminate their intimacy.

" No, no," said Mortimer, " you are right,

— he will not come back this evening: — no, no; he will never come back to this house!"

"I don't think," said Wilkins, — "I — it would be best to wait, — it is not nine yet; — and" ——

"Oh!" said Mortimer, "I shall wait, — what else have I to do? She went at three, and" ——

"Who, sir?" said Wilkins, with a look of honest anxiety.

"My wife!" said Mortimer.

"But, sir," said Wilkins, "you don't think that Mr. Frank is — is" ——

"I *do* think so," said Mortimer, pale as death, and trembling with emotion, — "and so do YOU!"

"I shouldn't have ventured to say a word on the subject," said Wilkins; "but — it *is* strange."

"Strange!" said Mortimer, — "it is certain — sure as we are alive here in this room: — let me but wait to know it. However, I must go to the dinner-room; they will wonder what keeps me from them. Let me know

the moment Francis comes, — ha, ha, ha! — he come! — no, no: — let me know when the boy returns with the horse, — for that will be *it*: — but not a word to anybody else!"

Mortimer returned to his guests, not much calmed, as we may easily suppose, by this interview; and Wilkins, who pretty well anticipated the results, proceeded to his room to arrange the accounts of the establishment, which were under his special care, in order that, if his master should put his long-desired threat of breaking up his establishment and flying from England into execution, no impediment in the way of business, at least as far as his department was concerned, should be interposed to the fulfilment of his intentions.

By ten o'clock, as had been anticipated, the boy and horse arrived. Coffee was being served in the drawing-room: Wilkins made his appearance, and crossing over to Magnus, who was expatiating upon the splendour of the view from one of the windows of one of his houses, gave him a letter, and, as he was quitting the room, stopped before his master's chair, and

in an under-tone mentioned that the boy was come back.

If he had plunged a dagger into his master's heart, he could scarcely have done him a greater injury. The realization of his own prophecy, — the fulfilment of his own anticipations! — prepared, as he thought himself, and resolved, as he believed himself, upon the line of conduct he should adopt, the news was worse than death. He started from his chair, and hurried again to his room, bidding Wilkins follow him thither.

"There's a letter from Mr. Frank," said Wilkins.

"A letter!" cried Mortimer: — "where there's life there's hope! — we may be saved yet. God grant it may be so! What letter? — who has it? — where is it?"

"I delivered it to Colonel Magnus," said Wilkins; "it was directed to *him*."

The next moment brought the Colonel to the door of the room.

"Is Mr. Mortimer here?" said he, seeing only Wilkins.

"Yes, sir," said the man.

Magnus entered the room, trembling with agitation, and looking as pale as usual, and even paler than his friend.

"It is so! — I know it all!" cried Mortimer.

Magnus paused, — spoke not, — but, not aware of the humiliation of Mortimer, and the consequent importance of Wilkins, waited as if he expected him to leave them. Wilkins, however, seemed inclined to stay.

"Leave us!" said Mortimer. Wilkins obeyed, but his move was not a long one: he went no farther than the lobby, and his ear was forthwith at the keyhole.

"Frank," said Magnus, you must be firm; — you must bear up against it."

"Merciful Heaven!" said Mortimer.

' See what the serpent you have cherished says!

"Dear Colonel,

"You must have wondered at my refusal to join you in your ramble this morning: at

that moment my fate was sealed. The step I have taken is ruinous, — but it was irresistible. How I can ever palliate my conduct to Mortimer, or to my mother, I know not. Pursuit is, however, useless: before this reaches you, I shall be far on my road to Oxford, whence we start across the country. London is not our destination. I should not have written, but that apprehensions might be entertained of her safety. Our minds are made up to the consequences.

" Yours, in a state of distraction,

" F. B."

Mortimer sat with his eyes fixed on his friend as he read this most unfortunate letter. Magnus had been so short a time in the house, since his last return to it, that he had never noticed either the beauty of Mary Mitcham, whom he had never seen before, or the attentions which Blocksford paid her; and Mortimer, conscious of a somewhat too tender feeling towards the girl himself, had neither mentioned her in his letters to Magnus, nor

attracted his notice to her since his arrival at Sadgrove. Possessed, therefore, with the one idea,—wholly engrossed by the one doubt, — the words of this dreadful note were an unequivocal corroboration of all his worst suspicions. Magnus, being of course ignorant of anything connected with Francis and Mary Mitcham tending to throw a doubt upon the real meaning of the communication, felt that it could refer to nothing but that to which he certainly had rather encouraged his friend to look forward. The question is, if Magnus *had* known enough of the family politics to put another construction upon the note, whether he would openly have done so, seeing that it would have instantly cleared up the affair, and produced a satisfactory explanation, which was exactly what he did not desire?

That he did not even think of the possibility of its referring to another person entirely, is most true; therefore, as it is not fair to question the intentions of others, he must be exonerated from the charge of wishing to keep up the misconstruction to which

it was liable, to the ruin of Mortimer's peace of mind. But what will be said of that basest of human beings, the listening menial, who having overheard the reading of the letter, and satisfied himself that its construction would almost miraculously further his vile and villanous objects, raised himself from his knees, and, hurrying to his room, filled a brimming glass of port wine, and drank, by himself alone, with fiend-like exultation, a bumper to the success of his odious machinations?

Mortimer heard the letter out, and, when Magnus had concluded, he threw himself back in his chair, and covered his face with his hands: Magnus himself, overcome by a thousand contending feelings, no matter what their character, spake not.

"My friend," said Mortimer, starting up, "my heartstrings are bursting! — my brain is on fire! I have lost her! — she is gone for ever! — and with whom? God is just! Now am I taught to feel the tortures I have myself inflicted. When *I* triumphed, and Amelia was the partner of my flight, *her* husband felt as

I do now. What did I care then? He was my friend! — what of that? Had he *not* been my friend, the opportunities would not have occurred which led to his disgrace. *I* am disgraced!—*I* am dishonoured! — and by him who —— Oh! is this to be borne? Will my mind hold? — will my senses remain? — What am I to do first? I knew it, — I knew it all! — saw it, — fool that I was to suffer it! But it is now too late! — all *that* is past: — what is to be done, is for the future."

There can be no question but that the existing state of affairs was such as to puzzle the best and wisest counsellor. The relative position of Blocksford and Mortimer, Magnus knew, must prohibit any appeal of that nature to which it is the fashion to resort under similar circumstances; but he knew enough of Mortimer's temper and character, and saw enough in the convulsive agitation of his features, to assure him that, let his decision be what it might, the result would be terrible.

After a pause of a few moments, Mortimer, apparently more collected, said,—

"Magnus, leave me: my course is resolved upon. My heart is broken; but I have deserved all that has happened: it is right it should have happened. I will act for myself; no human being shall be involved in the responsibility. Go back to the drawing-room, — say I am unwell, — that I am gone to bed, — that we shall meet in the morning: — but do not drop a hint, — do not whisper,—do not even look so as to create a suspicion about Helen. I have not been unprepared for this: my arrangements have been made for some time in anticipation of her defection. But what meanness!— what hypocrisy! — and how unlike her! — the anxiety — the pretended mad anxiety to visit her father! —and now to discover that she has abandoned him, and the whole scheme to fly from London with this wretched boy! Go, Magnus, go; let us part for the night; to-morrow you shall see me: I shall be more at rest, —calmer, more tranquil."

"I really do not like to quit you, my dear Mortimer," said the Colonel, "under such circumstances. I" ——

"I entreat as a favour that you will," said Mortimer. "Rely upon it, I am right; I do not think over this matter now for the first time. I shall probably not go to bed early, for I have much to do. No word henceforth shall pass my lips upon this subject; and remember that no allusion is to be made to my sufferings or disgrace to-morrow. The public news of the event cannot reach this till the next day. Save me from the humiliation of condolence from the hollow friends who are here. To-morrow Lady Mary goes, and, of course, Lord Harry.—Ha, ha, ha! I can see *that*,—can join in the world's laugh against the brave and worthy man absent on his country's service;—and yet—— Oh! mercy!—mercy! —mercy! Leave me, my dear friend,—leave me; but, as you value my existence, keep my secret."

After some ineffectual remonstrances on his part, Magnus acceded to Mortimer's desire, and quitted him; the latter pledging himself tc discuss in the morning, with calmness and composure, the details of proceedings natu-

rally resulting from the lamentable event which had occurred. Magnus accordingly returned to the drawing-room; and before the party, reduced as it was, separated for the night, every individual composing it knew that Mrs. Mortimer and Frank Blocksford had gone off together. Each one of the guests had his joke against his host, even though the sneer were clothed in sympathy, and the ridicule tempered with pity; but Lady Mary at length broke up the conclave by sagaciously observing, "that if men who had excellent wives did not know how to take care of them, they had nobody to blame but themselves."

CHAPTER IV.

Those who have voyaged on the deep blue waters of the mighty ocean, know that, when the tempest rages in its greatest violence, it has the effect at times of keeping down the sea. In the struggle of elements the imperious wind lords it over the rebellious waves, and holds them in subjection : so with Mortimer's rage and passion. The pangs he felt were far beyond expression. To have looked at him when Magnus had left him, pale, calm, and collected, one might have fancied his heart wholly occupied by grief and sorrow ; but no one would have suspected the real character of his sufferings, or the resolution to which he had come in order to avenge his wrongs.

Wrongs ! — poor, wretched, deluded man ! Oh ! if the miserable master of Sadgrove could

have been permitted the privilege we have assumed, of looking into that letter-box which we have examined, what ruin might have been averted !—what misery avoided ! But no: the wickedness of man must work its way, and treachery still triumph over the best of us. To fancy that, having pre-determined his wife's guilt, and thinking every woman vicious for that he had found some to be so, he should, upon the "trifle light as air," (for so it was, inasmuch as a second or third reading of the giddy boy's letter to Magnus must have somehow explained the fatal mistake,) adopt the course which was eternally to blight his hopes of peace and happiness, and turn the amiable Helen a solitary outcast upon the world ! Yet so it seemed destined to be.

After Magnus left him, Mortimer proceeded to the nursery: he found his children sleeping soundly. When they first met his eyes, his agonized mind was relieved by a burst of tears, which he in vain endeavoured to conceal from the nurse who was watching over them. She saw him weep, but of course said nothing to

him,—only remarking to the maid, after he had left the room, that she really did not till then, think Master cared so much for Missus,—attributing this burst of sorrow to the temporary absence of Helen in London.

From the nursery he proceeded to his wife's boudoir. The first objects that met his eye were the two drawings which Francis had made nearly three years since for Helen; these, not with the violence of rage, but with all the method of sober sense, he dragged from the ribands which held their frames to the wall, and tore into atoms. He next searched for her writing-desk, feeling all the while like a thief in the night, and dreading lest he should be interrupted. He found it not, for it had been put into the carriage with her dressing-case and other personal requisites. This added new fuel to the flame; it was in their writing-desks that wives left the records of their sin:—Amelia's writing-desk rose up in evidence against him on his trial,—but no;—Helen was more artful than Amelia, and had taken the precaution to remove the proofs of her criminality.

Poor Helen! — there was not in her writing-desk a line that might not have been read at the market-cross at mid-day; she did not even know that Mitcham had been so attentive as to give it to the servant to be packed in the carriage: however it was gone.

He passed into their bed-room, and stood and gazed wildly and vacantly around him, his limbs trembling, and the cold dew standing on his forehead; again that agonizing pang which all of us have felt when a loved object has been lost to us, and all the scenes of happiness which we have enjoyed together have flashed into the mind, shot through his heart. What! was he never to behold her more? — NEVER? — oh, dreadful word! — And where — where was *she* at the moment he was calling on her name? He flung himself upon the bed, and madly seizing the pillow she had abandoned, clasped it to his breast, and covered it with kisses.

Why, — why, in the name of all that is dreadful, should these people be eternally parted?

All this evil, — all this misery, although

ripened to perfection by the accidental circumstances with the real nature of which we have been made acquainted, were caused originally by a want of candour and of confidence, which alone were necessary to confirm and secure the love and devotion which Helen sincerely felt when she married her husband. But there was a fate in it, or rather, let us say, a retributive justice, destined to inflict upon Mortimer the pangs which, as he said himself, it had been his glory to inflict upon others. If Mortimer's conscience had permitted him to have taken his bride in the first instance to her future home, the excursion to Paris would have been avoided. From that excursion sprang the renewal of his acquaintance with the Countess St. Alme, and the consequent fatal association with her son.

Had Helen never been subjected to an intimacy with the Countess, happiness with Mortimer would in all probability have been her lot; and most assuredly would it have been so, if the prejudices which the Countess constantly kept alive in his bosom against his

exemplary sister, Mrs. Farnham, had been suffered to subside, and he had consented to her visit to his young and high-spirited wife at the time she volunteered to come to her.

"If," they say, is a valuable peace-maker; but, in *our* history, the very recollection that "if" such things *had* been done, and such things had *not* been done, it would have terminated differently, almost puts us out of patience: our business now is to see what *will* be done.

Having quitted the bed-chamber, Mortimer proceeded down the back-stairs to his own room; and, as he passed a door which opened into the hall, he heard the merry laugh still ringing in the drawing-room where his friends were still assembled. The echo of their mirth made him shudder: it would be many a day before those walls resounded with joyousness again; — and how much of retrospect that anticipatory thought involved may easily be imagined.

The night that followed this was a night of horrors. Mortimer, having wreaked his vengeance upon the memorials of the unoffend-

ing Francis, rang his bell, and summoned Wilkins to council.

"Lock the door!" said Mortimer, ashamed and afraid of being detected by Magnus in this confidential association with this creature.

Wilkins obeyed, delighted to find that he had superseded even the Colonel.

"To-morrow I leave this place,—for ever!"

The words were music to the miscreant's ear.

"I take my children with me," said Mortimer; "but this you are to keep secret till the morning. I have tried you, — found you faithful: — you have my confidence. I had promised you that if — and I *did* foresee it — I should ever be driven to this extremity, you should be left here in charge of everything. I will prepare such a paper as shall ensure you this control. Tell me, have you been near the rooms which that—I cannot describe him —Blocksford occupied?"

"I have been there, sir," said Wilkins, "and, as you suggested, placed his clothes and papers in order."

"Papers! — were there any letters? — any ——?"

"Yes, sir," said Wilkins, with an affected hesitation.

"Go, — go," said Mortimer, — "fetch me those papers; and, mark me, — not to-night, but early in the morning, tell some of the women-servants to pack up my wife's wardrobe."

"Sir!" said Wilkins, with a well-acted start of horror.

"Ay, all," said Mortimer. "Her maid is gone with her, but let any one of them, I care not which, pack up everything that is hers, — jewels and all, if they are left: let Bennett do what Mitcham would have done if she had been here: — I cannot even look upon the records of other days: — have them all packed up, and Mr. Blocksford's things you can arrange. Send them all off; send them — I know not where — best to her father's, whose sickness and illness are all a fiction, — all a feint. I will write to him myself during the night: I shall not go to bed. You will see to all this: get ready

whatever accounts are necessary to be settled, and to-morrow I start for the Continent with my two poor innocent babes — but again remember, not a word to anybody : you shall have ample powers left to manage everything after my departure."

It would be impossible to describe the savage joy which animated the heart of this unprincipled wretch when he found that all his hopes and expectations were on the point of being realized. It seemed not only that fate and fortune had favoured him, but that Mortimer was actually playing into his hands in a manner almost calculated to make him sceptical as to its reality.

That Mortimer was virtually mad at the moment, there can be but little doubt: his placidity of manner, combined with the firmness of purpose which we have already noticed, was absolutely awful. To have seen him and heard him making arrangements for the morrow, the effect of which would be his eternal separation from his wife, and the utter ruin of all his hopes of domestic comfort or tranquillity, in

a tone and temper suited to the commonplace directions for a short journey, or even an excursion of pleasure, would have startled anybody who was aware of his habitual violence, and had seen him in those paroxysms of rage to which he was subject. Wilkins was perfectly astounded, and could scarcely bring himself to believe that his deluded and betrayed master really intended to fulfil all that he now projected. It will be seen that this active minister determined to leave no effort untried to bind him to his purpose.

Having sent Wilkins to his manifold duties, and having had a few minutes' conversation with Magnus, who came to him, on his way to his room for the night, in which he referred but slightly to the all-engrossing subject, appearing anxious to act entirely for himself, without either seeking advice or involving others in any responsibility, he parted from him with the ordinary phrase of "We shall meet at breakfast;" and, as the door closed upon him, felt relieved from a world of anxiety by finding himself again free and

unfettered to take his own course. That it was a desperate, — a cruel course, no one that knew Mortimer's heart and temper, when acted upon by circumstances like those in which he had so suddenly found himself placed, could doubt.

In the midst of his doubts and disbelief, of poor Helen he had, as we have seen, satisfied himself that the illness of her father, if not altogether a fiction, had been greatly exaggerated in order to bring about the journey. The affectionate anxiety of his unhappy wife to see that father, — to hear his last sigh, — to receive his last blessing, was construed into an ardent haste to put her criminal designs into execution; and her ready acquiescence in his desires, or rather her obedience to his command, that she should go without him, was perverted into an unquestionable manifestation of her eagerness to be rid of his society.

Convinced of the justice of his views, and the validity of his reasonings, he resolved, in his uncertainty as to the destination of Helen and her beardless paramour, to write to Batley

himself the history of her crime, detailed in all its extremest horrors, and his final renunciation of her, consequent upon its commission. Thus would he wreak his vengeance upon him who, according to his friend the Colonel's account, had hunted him down as a husband for his giddy, flirting, and portionless daughter; and stab the parent while he spurned the child.

"Nothing," says Lavater, "is so pregnant as cruelty. So multifarious, so rapid, so ever-teeming a mother, is unknown to the animal kingdom: each of her experiments provokes another, and refines upon the last: though always progressive, yet always remote from the end." When Mortimer came to the resolution of writing to Batley, he almost smiled with satisfaction at his own ingenuity in devising misery for his wretched friend,—for so he once esteemed him; and, as if no thought of his brain,—no action of his life, might be uninfluenced by the fate which hung over him, he was roused from the reverie into which he had fallen by a gentle tap at the door of his

room. The usual "Come in" presented to his view the miscreant Wilkins, who, according to his master's orders, had brought down the papers which lay on Blocksford's table. They consisted of two or three sonnets, and verses, partly original, and partly transcribed from those popular receptacles for nonsense upon stilts, the Albums and Annuals; but, above and beyond all these, was the hastily written note, which we know he had addressed to Mary Mitcham the evening before, when, at the time, he did not anticipate the opportunity of seeing or speaking to her again.

"I have brought the papers, sir," said Wilkins.

"Right," said Mortimer, — "give them to me: there, go, — leave me, leave me!—and do not come again till I ring, or at least till you are going to bed. Bring me fresh lights; I shall stay here till morning: I have much to do."

Wilkins did as he was bid, and Mortimer, anxious not to betray his weakness before the

fellow whom he had raised to the state of a confidential councillor, waited till the lights were brought, and the man again gone, before he ventured to read the papers which the crafty villain had laid before him.

The first, the second, the third, were harmless verses, — all of love, but no more; the fourth and last which he looked at was the note, — *the* note which the reader remembers.

"It is natural, dearest, that your feelings should be deeply affected at this moment; and I own that nothing but my conviction that this is an opportunity not to be lost, would have induced me to be so peremptory; but, as you have made me the happiest of happy men, a few words may save us much trouble. Whether you stop at 'The Star' or 'The Angel,' of course I shall know: trust to me for the rest, and fear nothing: I, of course, have plenty of *friends* in Oxford, and at either house. I believe, knowing your kind and tender heart, that parting from the dear children will give you the severest pang of all;

but you must not let that feeling get the better of those which you own I have inspired. Heaven bless you! Before this time to-morrow we shall be safe from the persecutions of all spies and enemies. Remember, — twelve!

" Ever yours,

" F. B."

Mortimer shuddered as he read this hateful proof of heartless treachery: his eyes traced and re-traced, as if they were written in blood, the words, " Remember,— twelve!" The thought, —the notion that the consummation of Helen's ruin and his own disgrace was at that period pending, maddened him; and, as if to aggravate every feeling, and sharpen every pang which his misery involved, at that moment, — that very moment the clock on the mantel-shelf struck the hour of midnight! — Mortimer started at the sound, clasped his hands on his forehead, and fell backwards in his chair.

Truly, indeed, did Mortimer admit the power of retributive justice. Some fourteen years before this night of misery, he had borne

from the arms of a confiding husband the wife whose affections he had won from her lord,—to the very house now desolated by imaginary crime had he brought this treasure of his heart: there had she lived with him, in all the doubtful happiness and feverish anxiety of unhallowed love,—there had she died;—and now came the avenger. What upon this earth is so terrible as the black retrospect of an ill-spent life! What made Mortimer's firm heart ache, and his proud spirit quail before the ills which oppressed him, but the horrid consciousness of what he *might* have been, and the dreadful recollection of what he *had* been? The combination, altogether, was tremendous: his former crimes,—his still continued acquaintance with the Countess—the result of that acquaintance—the flight of Helen—her partner in that flight.

All this flashed into his mind,—flashed and burned and raged: his brain was maddened! He started from his seat, and, having fastened the door, proceeded to the table on which lay his pistol-case: he opened it, took out one

of the deadly weapons, deliberately loaded it, and then walking towards the glass which was over the fireplace, and looking steadfastly and intently on it, placed the muzzle of the pistol to his throbbing temple.——One instant and all would have been over: a faint sound caught his ear: it was the waking cry of his infant boy. It acted like magic upon the distracted father: the hand that held the pistol fell motionless.

"God is just!" said Mortimer,—"but he is merciful. I hear the cry of my child,—my deserted child: it is a call from Heaven!—humbly, devoutly, gratefully do I respond to it! For my children, abandoned by their mother, will I live—yes—and consent to bear a load of wretchedness about me, and be for ever a mark for the finger of scorn to point at."

He listened; no further sound was heard:—the poor unconscious babe had sunk to sleep again.

With equal calmness and firmness Mortimer drew the charge of the pistol which had

been destined to send him from a transitory world of woe to one of eternal punishment; and replacing it in its case, returned to his chair, and, after a self-communing of some hour or so, commenced with a firm hand the following letter to his father-in-law.

Sadgrove,
One o'clock, A.M., April 11, 18—.

"You may easily imagine the embarrassment in which the necessity of writing this letter involves me; it is a task of terror, but it must be performed. Helen has left me. I have for a considerable length of time doubted, suspected, and believed her guilty: I have even hinted as much to her; but, with an artfulness which I too late discovered to be her characteristic, she appeared to be unconscious of my meaning. It is all over now. Under the pretext of visiting you in an illness which I have good reason to believe never afflicted you, at least to the extent described, she quitted Sadgrove yesterday at about three o'clock: at dinner-time Mr. Francis Blocksford was absent: he has not returned; and I have before

me proofs irrefragable that they met at Oxford, and thence took their departure for some other destination.

"Far be it from me to reproach you for the course and character of the education which you were pleased to give Helen. In the earliest stage of my affection for her, I always felt the danger and difficulty which a man would incur who should try to domesticate so much spirit and pretension, favoured and excited as they had been by your own unlimited indulgence of her, and the absurd flattery of a herd of fops and fools, who think it fine to set up an idol upon a pedestal in society, and worship it, God knows why!

"When you persecuted me back to London, after I had quitted it, disgusted with what I had seen of Helen's conduct with Lord Ellesmere, whom she jilted, I was weak enough to believe my authority sufficiently strong to render her the means of restoring me to happiness: but no! —the hope was frail,—the delusion brief; and I soon found that the opinions of some very old friends of mine, that I had

utterly miscalculated the results of my marriage, were but too well founded.

"In fact, my life has, for the last three years, been a life of misery, — misery created by an anxiety which I can scarcely describe: she universally betrayed a want of confidence in me; she always appeared estranged from me, — rather afraid of me than loving me with the frankness and cordiality which her apparent ingenuousness had led me to expect. A marked effort to be obedient, and never to thwart my wishes, and a strained desire to be remarkably careful never to do what she thought I should not like, were not the genuine fruits of a real devoted attachment. In fact, she never could forget that I had been devoted to another; and, as I know from unquestionable authority, listened with pleasure to histories of my former indiscretions: nay, to such an extent did she carry this, that very soon after our marriage I found, by accident, in her room, a volume of a book containing the trial between Hillingdon and myself about Amelia, selected out of ten thousand other volumes in

my library for her special edification. When I charged her with this needless anxiety to detect my faults, she made some pretext that the Countess St. Alme had sent it her for some other purpose, I forget what. This the Countess, however, positively denied to me; and although I did not condescend to mention the matter again, it has remained registered in my mind ever since.

"You may wonder how what may appear to you a trifle, can occupy me at a moment like this, when she has worked her own destruction and my disgrace; but, as I dare say we shall hereafter find the lady justifying her crime by something like retaliation, I think it important to mention a circumstance so illustrative of the spirit upon which she has uniformly acted, occurring as it did within so short a time after our marriage.

"To you, who must be aware of my early and long intimacy with the Countess St. Alme, the fact that Mr. Francis Blocksford is the partner of Helen's flight will perhaps be particularly shocking: that I have sense enough

left to write these lines is my only wonder. I thought that Helen, during the last few months, must have known more of this connexion than she previously did, because she made a condition that the Countess should not pay her annual visit here this season; but now I believe this exclusion to have had its origin only in an apprehension that the Countess might have detected the intrigue which was in progress between her and Francis. If she were to object to an association with the Countess St. Alme on any other score, I have only to observe, that you were perfectly aware of the intimacy which had long subsisted between us, as well as of the delicacy of the Countess's position in society, and that you never objected to her being an inmate in your daughter's house.

"The line I have determined to adopt will have been taken before this reaches you. By noon of this day, — for it is past midnight while I write, — I shall have quitted Sadgrove with my children, who must be preserved from the contamination which any further inter-

course with their wretched mother would involve. I shall write by this post to my solicitors to take such steps as may be considered necessary in the affair, and to provide Helen with the income secured to her either as jointure or by that most extraordinary clause in the settlements, inserted, I believe, at *your* suggestion, 'in case of separation.' I really do not know which to compliment the more, your instinctive providence as a parent, or your well-matured knowledge of the world as a man, in having made this special condition: in either case it does you infinite credit, and, I promise you, your daughter shall have full benefit of your 'diplomacy.'

"What measures I may subsequently adopt will be matter for future consideration: the initiatory proceedings which I have instituted are simply those of sending forth out of my house everything that can be supposed to belong to the fugitives. As my hand is stayed against taking vengeance upon the partner of her flight by ties of which the world may not be told, — they may be guessed at, — it will

be of little consequence to me whether or not I rid myself of a guilty wife by a course of law; the feeling which must spare the life of Francis Blocksford, may extend even to saving him from ruin in a worldly sense of the word. His fortune is small, for his mother's husband was reduced in circumstances before his death.

" As I have already said, as far as money matters are concerned, your unfortunate daughter is, *providentially*, at her ease, and therefore my care for her future career is at an end. She may rest assured I shall never farther interfere with her: the connexion she has formed may secure her a happiness, upon which I shall never intrude, and a tranquillity, which I have no disposition to disturb. The only point upon which I take my stand is, as regards the children. Within eight-and-forty hours of the moment in which I write this, they will be removed beyond her reach, never to be restored to her sight until they are old enough to shun and revolt from her whom, if her own misconduct had not

destroyed the claim, they ought to have loved and obeyed.

"Mark, this is the last letter that you will ever receive from me. Ten thousand circumstances had estranged you from me previously to this horrid disgrace; your brother, as I have frankly admitted, I never could endure; and the person whom you have thought proper to marry appears to be by no means an unlikely confidante in the scheme, the success of which imperatively separates us for ever.

"I have left to the servants the immediate removal of everything from Sadgrove belonging to Helen, with directions to send the whole of her personal property to your house, and with it whatever the viper I have cherished in my bosom may have left behind him. I dismiss them both for ever from my mind: — my deepest, bitterest curses, be upon their heads! Mark me, again, in conclusion, — no supplication with regard to the children, no remonstrance, no palliation, no explanation, nothing will avail, — I repeat solemnly and finally, they will never see their unnatural

mother until I have taught them to hate and despise her.

"If I fancied you were an hundredth part so ill as the deceiver painted you, I would not inflict this letter upon you; but her falsehoods are now laid bare, and I discredit the whole story. If you feel yourself aggrieved, or are wildly romantic enough to espouse your ruined daughter's cause, a line 'forwarded' to my solicitors shall afford you the opportunity of vindicating *her* and exposing *yourself* at any time you may suggest. Whatever reflections your conduct in the arrangement of our marriage may suggest, I shall not so far shelter myself under my own opinions as to refuse you, even now, the consideration of a gentleman.

"F. M."

Mortimer, besides this letter, wrote, as he said he should, to his solicitors, apprizing them of what had occurred, and directing what should be done; for, be it understood, that men who have extensive connexions and

various concerns to conduct, being thrown into different circles, for different purposes invariably use more than one lawyer. In the management of his affairs, properly so to be called, Mortimer naturally consulted his solicitors, who were men of character, of honour, and of reputation; but in the jugglery of usurious money-raising, compromising dirty actions, and all such business, one of the grubbers of the profession was retained: hence his association with Mr. Brimmer Brassey. Quick, ready, and indefatigable, there was scarcely any capacity in which Mr. Brassey would not act to oblige an aristocratic client; but as to confiding to him the conduct of a case like this which had now burst upon him, Mortimer would as soon have cut off his right hand as permitted their names to be associated in the public papers, through which, as it seemed most probable, the whole of the particulars must eventually be given to the world.

But now, could it be believed, except that we know it is true, that Mortimer, — mad,

—absolutely mad, as we have already seen, —on the verge of suicide, and reckless, in every sense of the word, of all that might happen, should be able to sit down and write a letter of studied insult to his father-in-law, wherein—(but see how that marks his character)—he could rake up the smallest circumstances that had occurred years before, and been treasured in his mind, to justify his earlier suspicion of his wife, who, at the moment he was writing this very letter, was on her knees praying for his happiness and that of her beloved children, before she sank into a deep and sweet sleep, induced by the journey and excitement and exertion, which, fortunately,—at least it might have been fortunately,—so overcame her bodily strength as to give her repose during a night through which, if it had not so happened, her anxiety for her suffering parent would have kept her awake.

Mortimer read over what he had written, and felt a savage pleasure in marking and pointing every line and word which he knew was best calculated to inflict pain upon his

unhappy father-in-law; and when he folded the letter, there was a sort of triumphant satisfaction in his manner of concluding his elaborated cruelty which was highly characteristic of the man: nay, so far did he carry his solicitude to mark the firmness of his resolution, even in the midst of the tempest of his feelings, that he took the trouble to hunt out from a long-neglected drawer a seal upon which *his* arms alone were engraved, — the Mortimer bearings without the alloy of the Batleys: — so much method was there in his madness.

Having achieved this measure, of the atrocity of which, to be sure, he was not conscious, Mortimer proceeded to write to his solicitors, to his bankers, and, in fact, to everybody who was in any degree professionally interested in the great move he was about to make, and so he remained until nearly four o'clock in the morning, when, worn out with fatigue of mind and body, he threw himself upon a sofa, and fell into a restless slumber for two or three hours.

It is not permitted us at this moment to know what had been passing at Oxford during the same period — that will be developed hereafter; but it *is* permitted us to hate and loath the wretch who could have saved all the misery which we see in progress, and who, while his wretched master was agonized and tortured even to the point of suicide, was sleeping soundly and dreaming of future prosperity.

CHAPTER V.

It may easily be imagined that Mortimer's slumbers were neither sound nor refreshing. That nature was so far exhausted as to sink under the excitement which had acted upon him, and that he actually did sleep for two or three hours, there can be no doubt: — but what a sleep! — and where! We must not indulge in thoughts and reflections; we shall have enough to do within the short space allowed us, to record events.

As Wilkins was the last person closetted with his master at night, so was he the first called into council in the morning; and the first subject upon which the master proposed to consult him was, the method of getting rid of his visiters without exciting a suspicion of the real cause of their sudden dispersion, or letting

them know his determination to quit Sadgrove in the course of the day. This trouble he need not have taken, for upon a mere hint of his difficulty and anxiety upon the point, his prime minister informed him that all the carriages, except that of Colonel Magnus, were ordered to be at the door immediately after breakfast, and that two sets of post-horses had already arrived from Worcester, having been sent for as early as six o'clock.

"But how is this?" said Mortimer: "Lady Mary did not mean to go for two or three days; — no more did Harvie, — nor Lord Harry."

"No, sir," said Wilkins, "but, of course, after what has happened, they naturally think their presence would not be very desirable; besides, they could not stay after you were gone, and" ——

"Gone!" exclaimed Mortimer, — "'after what has happened' — what do you mean? They know nothing of what has happened; — they cannot understand what I propose to do."

"Lord bless you! sir," said Wilkins, "they knew all about it last night. The Colonel, I believe, told Lady Mary in confidence, in order that she might go; and she mentioned it to Lord Harry, that he might go too: and as they were both making arrangements for going, it was thought best to let Captain Harvie into the secret: and then the horses were to be ordered early in the morning: and then, after Lady Mary's young lady had undressed her, and seen her to bed, *she* knew of it; and so after supper it was generally talked of in my room, and the under servants, of course, could not long remain ignorant of it."

"Then I am proclaimed!" said Mortimer. "I thought I could have trusted Magnus with any secret, but I was deceived."

"Ah! sir," said Wilkins, "there is no relying upon anybody in *this* world. The Colonel, to be sure, might as well have kept it snug: as for me, the grave is not more silent than I was, until I found that everybody in the house knew as much as myself."

"That being the case," said Mortimer, "I will see none of them: it will save us all a world of painful effort. Say that I am too ill to leave my room. Tell Colonel Magnus to come to me as soon as they are all gone. Desire the nurse to bring the children to me here: I will not run the risk of encountering any of them in my way along the lobby to the nursery: let me see the children directly; — and take care that I have four horses here at two o'clock. When the Colonel leaves me, bring me some breakfast here, and then let me see your books, and I will settle the current accounts, leaving you a sufficient sum to pay the Worcester bills and bills here."

"This, sir," said Wilkins, endeavouring to hide his exultation under an expression of sorrow which he contrived to throw into his countenance, "is a sad and heavy day! — more hearts than yours, sir, will ache at this break-up."

"I knew too well how surely it must happen," said Mortimer, "but the blow has fallen, and talking will not relieve me from

its weight; so do all that I have told you, and let it be understood that I do not join my friends at breakfast." — "Gracious Heaven!" added he, "what revolutions may be effected in one short day! This time yesterday, Helen, the admired, courted, and flattered mistress of Sadgrove, was surrounded by companions each vying with the other to do her honour; and now —— I must not think of this: I have much to do that must and shall be done on the instant. My heart might, even now, relent, if I hesitated in action. The children must be saved, and, to save them, they must be instantly placed beyond her reach, — ay, even beyond her knowledge of their destination."

"Why, sir," said Wilkins, "it is a hard thing to do, but if you feel it right to take such a step, why, as I say, the sooner it is done"——

"Aye, and the more decidedly it is done," interrupted his master, "the better. When *they* are safe, I shall return to await the call of my father-in-law, if my letter should have

roused his anger. As for the wretched cause of my misery, he "——

"Ah! sir," said Wilkins, "there it is. Of course *you* couldn't think of raising your hand against *him!*"

"Why, sir?" said Mortimer, doubting the evidence of his senses when he heard these words.

"Oh! sir," said Wilkins, apparently alarmed at his master's sudden excitement, "I don't know, sir."

"You *do* know, sir!" said Mortimer, — "and how do you know it?"

"I beg a thousand pardons, sir!" said Wilkins. "I ought not to have said what I did."

"Said!" exclaimed Mortimer, "you may say what you please, — you have *said* nothing: — but what do you *mean?* Why should I not raise my arm against Francis Blocksford as I would raise it against any other violater of my honour?"

"Why," said Wilkins, doubtful whether he should at once proclaim his perfect know-

ledge of the whole truth, — "he is your godson, sir, — named after you ; — and — his mother, sir"——

"Well, sir, what of that?" said Mortimer. "You mean more than you say. What have you heard?—what do you know? Why speak of the Countess St. Alme? — what has she to do with her son's criminality?"

"No, sir," said Wilkins; "but considering how intimate you have been for so many years, and" ——

"That 's not the point," said Mortimer. "Tell me, this instant, what your knowledge, — what your suspicions are, to induce you to believe that there exists some tie between the destroyer of my happiness and myself, which holds my hand from taking just revenge upon his villainy!"

"I wish I had not said a word upon the subject," said Wilkins.

"But you *have* said a word upon the subject," cried his master, "and more words you must say upon the subject before I part with you. You know I implicitly trust you, — I

rely upon you: in return for this confidence, have I not a right to demand an explanation of an expression which conveys so much?"

"It was foolish of me to let the word drop," said Wilkins, whose affected unwillingness to let his master know how perfectly his secrets were in his keeping, produced exactly the effect upon his victim which he intended it should produce, — "but what I meant, sir, was, — and you will not be angry, — it is not my nature to deceive, — and I spoke without thinking, — I did hear, some twelve or fourteen months since, that Mrs. Woodgate said openly that Mr. Francis was more likely the son than the godson of her master."

"What! — Woodgate, Helen's former maid?" said Mortimer.

"The same, sir," said Wilkins, "and *I* believe she knew more about it than she chose to say."

"This makes matters worse than all," said Mortimer. "If Woodgate knew it, Helen knows it, — at least," checking himself, "whatever there is to know."

"I believe, sir," said Wilkins, "that Mrs. Woodgate did not stick at trifles to find out anything she wanted to get hold of; she didn't care what she did in that way. In fact, I have caught her listening, with her ear to the keyholes of rooms in which parties have been conversing, — ay, fifty times, sir."

"Infernal treachery!" exclaimed Mortimer.

"Horrid duplicity!" murmured the man.

"Why did you not tell me of this at the time?" said Mortimer.

"I did not like to intrude, sir," replied Wilkins. "I always fancy that a master to whom one servant informs against another, may fancy it is done to get unfairly into his good graces."

"Ridiculous!" said Mortimer. "And so, then, it is generally thought here that Mr. Francis Blocksford and I are, in point of fact, more nearly related than our different names would lead the world to suspect."

"No, sir," said Wilkins, "not generally. Miss Nettleship, Lady Bembridge's young lady, said, that *her* lady was never comfort-

able where the Countess St. Alme was; and that she thought it a pity she was so much here; and that she remembered something, and that sort of thing; and Miss Nettleship said she could not make out what her lady meant, because she never spoke straight out; but when she had done talking about it, she laughed, and said she really thought Mr. Francis Blocksford very like you, which, as she added, considering your Christian names were the same, was odd enough."

How much farther this dialogue might have been carried, it is impossible to say: it was one of deep interest to Mortimer, inasmuch as what had transpired in the course of it convinced him that Helen herself had been enlightened upon the point of Frank's connexion with him, and that her knowledge, or even suspicion, of such a fact, increased her criminality in a tenfold degree. A tap at the door, however, terminated it: it was Colonel Magnus who solicited admission.

This unexpected arrival induced Mortimer to change the order of his arrangements, and

desire Wilkins to send the children when he next rang his bell.

The dialogue which ensued between the friends it is not worth while to record; its character and details may easily be imagined. Magnus did not attempt to dissuade him from his resolution of not again seeing his guests; and when reproached with having let slip the secret which he had promised to keep, he soothed and satisfied Mortimer by a justification of his conduct founded on the belief that it would be much better, — as he himself admitted, — that the party should break up without any further discussion of the subject, which would have been impossible if an attempt to conceal the truth had been made, inasmuch as during breakfast and the morning the conversation would naturally have turned upon Mrs. Mortimer's journey and the absence of Blocksford; and, after all, there must have been some explanation of the reason for Mortimer's dismissing his guests so suddenly, and quitting his house so abruptly: — "And so," said the Colonel, "eventual publicity being inevitable, I

considered it by far the best way to let so much of the truth be understood last night as would relieve you from the necessity of telling the whole of it this morning."

To the man earnestly anxious to get rid of his visiters, and to put into execution a decisive scheme of cutting at once the ties which held him to Sadgrove, a much less plausible explanation than that of the Colonel would have been perfectly satisfactory; Magnus, therefore, was commissioned to do the honours, and convey the best wishes of Mortimer to his friends, who were exceedingly well pleased with the arrangement, seeing, as Lady Mary Sanderstead observed, "that nothing is so unpleasant as melancholy stories; and as to condolence, it is the greatest possible bore to both parties: and on such occasions as the present, it was so difficult to know what to say, and the poor man would, of course, be so wretched: and then they had known Helen so intimately, — and it was altogether so exceedingly shocking!" — having said all which, Lord Harry Martingale handed her to her carriage; and finding that by some

mistake neither his carriage nor the horses which he had desired his servant to order had arrived, her ladyship was good enough to offer him a seat in her britscha as far as Worcester, if he was not afraid to venture, and if Colonel Magnus would not be censorious.

Thus flirting, thus giggling, and thus chattering, the dear friend of the Mrs. Mortimer of yesterday, left her desolated home for ever, not having thought it necessary even to take one last look at the innocent babes whom she had left behind her.

When they had all departed, Magnus returned to his friend, who then left his room, and visited again, and, as he felt, for the last time, the drawing-room, the favourite boudoir of his wife, and all that *suite* which she had so lately cheered and ornamented by her presence. The song she had last sung still rested on the desk; the flowers she had last gathered still bloomed where she had placed them; and as Mortimer gazed on them in the dead stillness of his deserted house, big tears rolled down his cheeks. All her grace and beauty,

and all her kindness to him during his long and painful illness, seemed set in array before him. He thought of her as if she were dead: his conscience accused him of a thousand faults — a thousand weaknesses—for his heart was melted; and if his friend at that moment had made the effort, the probability is, that at all events his departure would have been at least delayed, and all might yet have been well. But no: — the friend was anxious that he should go; and when he saw how powerfully the recollection of his lost Helen affected the wretched husband, he led him from the scene which so excited him, and begged him to bear up against a misfortune which was now inevitable, and make those arrangements which a regard for his own honour, and justice to his children, peremptorily demanded that he should forthwith conclude.

The clock had not struck three when Mortimer, with his two children and their nurse within the carriage, and his valet in the rumble, bade adieu to Sadgrove, having arranged all his domestic affairs, and installed Wilkins

in an office, the name or nature of which was not precisely defined, but which, according to the promised written authority which his master had left in his hands, gave him full control over the whole of the domestics, and by the unlimited, and what might be called unguarded, terms in which it was couched, rendered him absolute monarch of Sadgrove, with the power of dismissing or retaining those subordinate members of the establishment whom he thought proper to keep or send away, his verbal instructions being, to reduce them to the smallest necessary number. Mr. Fisher appeared delighted at the intelligence of his principal's retirement, (he did not call him master,) as it permitted his aspiring spirit to take an unencumbered flight to the regions of taste, where his genius and skill would be far better appreciated than in the house of a gentleman of a gloomy temper, who ate roast mutton and salad *par preference.*

Mr. Tapley also received the notice that his services would be dispensed with, with perfect composure. It was, however, wholly

out of his power to make up the cellar-books before Mr. Mortimer's departure, and therefore his vouchers were necessarily to be rendered to Mr. Wilkins: this took, as appeared in the sequel, two or three days properly to arrange, during which period it was observed that a most extraordinary number of *empty* bottles left the Hall in divers and sundry carts for Worcester.

That Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Tapley were *d'accord*, nobody can doubt: they both agreed in rejoicing at the incalculable advantages of such an occurrence as that which had taken place in the family, and in possessing a master who, however democratic his taste might be as to the *cuisine*, had a soul far above the paltry consideration of his cellar.

The reader need not be informed that the unfortunate family of the Crawleys were speedily ejected from their tenement, as the consequence of their father's removal from his stewardship,—a measure which Mr. Wilkins represented as being the result of an imperative order from Mr. Mortimer. Ten days were allowed the unfortunate old man to render his accounts

and make his retreat; which having been effected, Mr. Wilkins set the workmen belonging to Messrs. Dabbs, Splash, and Wypum, the painters and paper-hangers at Worcester, to fit up in the nicest possible manner the very agreeable house which the ejected steward had for many years occupied, previously to paying their bill for work done at Sadgrove, in which his little "commission" was to be, of course, included.

Such being the state of affairs at head quarters, we may perhaps be permitted to take a glance at what has been doing elsewhere.

In the outset, it may be as well to inform the reader that Mr. Jacob Batley, having realized as much money as he considered essential to his own comfort, had retired from business and taken a box at Walworth, where he ruralized during the morning, but whence, in order to prevent the possibility of being forced into anything like hospitality, he regularly proceeded to town in a low four-wheeled carriage, built to hold only "one inside," and drawn by one horse, in which he diurnally

journeyed to "The Horn," where he regularly dined, varying his habits only inasmuch as that on Sundays he favoured his brother Jack with his company.

In order to place himself completely *à l'abri*, and entirely out of reach of the effects of mercantile speculation, he had disposed of his business, and invested in the Funds the nett profits which he had realized. He thought that if he bought land, it would entail upon him innumerable cares and embarrassments; bad tenants, appeals to his consideration, legal involvements, and a thousand other inconveniences. By his present arrangement, he had nothing to do but to receive his dividends, and as they amounted to a sum vastly exceeding his annual expenditure, Mr. Brimmer Brassey, who managed all his matters, was directed to continue investing the overplus, although no power on earth could induce old Batley to make a will. In fact, his horror at the mere suggestion of "giving or bequeathing" anything that was his own was such, that his legal adviser felt his tenure of

office dependent mainly upon his evitation of that extremely disagreeable subject.

During John Batley's illness, Jacob had called but once, and that was on the Sunday preceding Helen's visit to London; and, upon that occasion, having come to dine, and being told that his brother was worse than he had been, and was in bed, he asked the servant whether his master would be able to go down to dinner. The man shook his head, and, with a countenance expressive of a melancholy anticipation that he would never go down to dinner again, replied in the negative. Jacob answered the announcement with a grunt, and then, in a tone of vexation caused rather by the disappointment of his expectations as to his hebdomadal dinner, than by anything like fraternal solicitude, he let down the front-glass of his "sulky," and, addressing his coach-boy on the box, said,

"Well then, Thomas, I suppose you must just go back to 'The Horn.' I have no pity for such people. I never was ill in my life. Psha! — there, go on."

As regards Helen's progress from Sadgrove to Oxford, her resting there, and the events which occurred during her stay, the reader is already pretty well prepared for the results. True to her faith to Francis, Miss Mitcham, throughout the journey, never permitted herself to be betrayed into an expression calculated to awaken her kind and considerate mistress's suspicions of the step so shortly to be taken by her and her devoted, — infatuated lover: and actuated by the same spirit of affection for him and submission to his will, she contrived, after having seen Helen safely deposited in bed for the night, to conduct her part of the enterprise with so much skill and dexterity, that it was not until nine o'clock on the following morning, and after Mrs. Mortimer had rung thrice, that the diffident fair one was returned "absent without leave." Upon a "reference" to her room, it appeared that her bed had not been slept in; but upon the table was left an open note, containing these words :

"When Mrs. Mortimer enquires for me in the morning, tell her that my flight is voluntary, and that I am safe and happy: all I regret is, the inconvenience my sudden departure may occasion her. I still live in hopes of forgiveness.

"M. M."

Helen, who was really and truly interested in Mary's fate, was entirely relieved from the anxiety she felt on the first announcement of the young lady's elopement. In her present state of solicitude about her father's health, the trifling discomfort arising from her maid's defection gave her little or no uneasiness; one of the chambermaids of the inn officiated quite satisfactorily: and when Helen sat down to her hurried and tasteless breakfast, the footman who was in attendance on her was questioned as to any knowledge of the circumstances connected with Mitcham's unexpected departure; but he denied all cognizance of her mental motives or personal movements, and Helen contented herself by writing a hasty

note to Mortimer, informing him of the circumstance, and of the progress she had herself made on her way to town.

Having finished these matters, Mrs. Mortimer again pursued her journey towards London, and reached Grosvenor Street at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

When Mortimer quitted Sadgrove, in order effectually to shut out anything in the shape of appeal or explanation from his wife or her father, he left directions with Wilkins to transmit whatever letters might arrive to his address, to his solicitors in London, who had received his instructions to keep them until they should hear further from him; nor was even Wilkins trusted with the knowledge of his master's destination, his secrecy upon that point being induced by the anxiety that the unfortunate Helen should obtain no clue to the place to which her children were to be removed beyond her reach: all that was known to anybody was, that the horses were ordered to Tewksbury. In consequence of these precautionary arrangements, Mortimer did not

receive the following answer from his wife until many days after its date.

Grosvenor Street, April 12, 18—.

"The vile, atrocious letter which you addressed to my father, and which was received this morning, came too late, — he was dead before it arrived: — and if anything can alleviate the grief which I feel for the loss of the kindest and best of parents, it is the blessed reflection that even in death he escaped the savage insults with which you had proposed to assail him, and a knowledge of the infamous falsehoods with which you have dared to calumniate me.

"I write this at his bed-side: my eyes are fixed upon his calm, placid countenance. The hand which would have avenged his injured child is clasped in mine; and I thank God that he was taken from me while yet unconscious of the degradation to which I have been subjected, or the fate to which I am doomed.

"What a heart must that be, — which I once believed I had gained, — in which could

rankle, year after year, feelings such as those which your letter avows, and which could lead you to address such a letter to the father of a devoted wife, while stretched on the bed of sickness and of death!

"If I could humble my proud spirit to answer the odious allegations which that letter contains, I would ask you what grounds I have ever afforded for your suspicions of my honour, or your belief in my duplicity and deception? — I would enquire upon what actions of mine was founded your opinion that the much-censured openness of my mind, and consequent freedom of expression, was assumed; or why you should imagine that a feeling of jealousy, founded upon a long-past attachment of yours to another, — the quiet of whose neglected grave I envy, — should have damped my affection for *you*, or have estranged me from the only man on earth I ever loved, and whose happiness it was my object, as it would have been my pride, to secure, or rather restore, regardless of all the bitter insinuations of the perfidious woman with whom you

thought it wise and honourable to associate me, and whose criminality you have thought proper to establish, while endeavouring to aggravate the character of the crime of which, in your baseness, you have thought me capable; by doing which, even if I had been the guilty creature you suppose me, you have drawn down upon your head the execration of every honest man and honourable woman, by admitting, in your rage, that you have made the partner of your early crimes the inmate of your house and the constant associate of your wife.

"To that woman — fiend is a better word — are attributable all those acts of mine which have entailed upon me your anger, and excited the belief that I was desirous of keeping alive the memory of your conduct towards the last of your victims. I knew it was useless to endeavour to undeceive you, or gain your confidence; but from the earliest of my errors, the visit to the fishing-temple, (since sacrificed to your violence,) to the last, having reference to the subject which I never

wished to touch upon, my councillor and adviser was the Countess St. Alme.

"You reproach my dead father with not objecting to that person's constant residence in our house. My father, knowing the world so well as he did, and therefore, perhaps, not judging too favourably of its ways, could not have conceived the possibility of such conduct as yours has been to me: on the contrary, having entrusted me and my honour to your charge, th very fact that the person in question was selecter by *you* as a companion for me, decided at once any doubts which might have floated in his mind, and convinced him that the rumours he had heard injurious to her character were unfounded.

"But why do I go on?—why do I condescend to argue or explain? Why should I declare my entire ignorance of Mr. Blocksford's destination, or why should I even write his name, considering who he really is, and why the secret of his origin has been divulged? I even doubt the truth of the asser-

tion, for I cannot believe that a son can inherit candour, honour, and sweetness of character, temper, and disposition, from a father who possesses no such qualities, but who, base and wicked himself, dares to criminate a wife whose only defection from the straight path of rectitude was her unfortunate marriage with him.

" I tell you, my father is dead, — lies dead here before me; but I answer your letter as *he* would have answered it, had he lived to receive it. Your offers of money and allowances, I despise and reject: you may tell your solicitors to burn the settlements, and cancel whatever documents exist, by virtue of which I have any claim upon you. I should feel myself debased and degraded, even as much as if I were what your vile imagination has painted me, if I accepted one shilling of your money: all I ask is, in return for the injuries you have done me, for the insults you have heaped upon me, the history of which must soon become universally known, — all I ask, — and

I will accept it even gratefully,—is the restoration of my children to my arms.

"Mortimer, I am innocent!—God knows the truth, and the world will know it too! Whatever may be the fate of Francis Blocksford,—whatever his objects, his intentions, his destination, they are all alike unknown to me. A few days must clear up the mystery of his disappearance, and establish my fame and reputation clear and unsullied; there can, therefore, be no reason why my children, whom I love better than my life, should be kept from me. But mark, the concession must involve no condition on *my* part as to a reconciliation with their father:—no, Mortimer,—once-loved Mortimer, the die is cast! If your letter had contained simply the outpourings of a heart deeply affected, and the effusions of a mind highly excited by designing persons, and filled with the belief of my criminality, which the lapse of a few hours would have disproved, I might, devoted as I have been to you, have made myself believe that

your violence, acting under some extraordinary delusion, was the result of ardent affection. But no, — it is not so: it is the outbreak of a volcano which has been long smouldering in your breast, and in its fury such horrid truths have been developed, that our separation must be eternal! Therefore, when I ask for my children, I ask for the possession of them as an atonement for the wrongs I have suffered, — for the suspicions under which I have laboured, — for the meannesses to which I have been subjected, — for the deceptions to which I have been a victim. Let me have my children, and I am content to bear all the ills the world may have in store for me; they shall be always at your command whenever you desire to see them, and you may trust me for teaching them to love you: *their* love may be reciprocated as mine never was: rely upon it, Mortimer, they shall never hear of your faults from *me*.

"As yet, dearest, dearest babes, they are unconscious of the character and fervour of a mother's affection, and even now scarcely miss

me; but ask yourself, even as a matter of policy, whether it would not be wise to confide them to *me*, at least till they arrive at a certain age. I could not condescend to ask a favour where I claim a right, but that the ties of Nature are not to be broken — a mother's love is not to be quenched; and if my *claim* is denied,—on my knees, even to the destroyer of my happiness, will *I beg* for my children.

"The struggle is over, and my proud spirit has yielded; even now, I beseech you to let me have them: — upon all other points I am firm, and repeat the words which are registered in my heart — OUR SEPARATION IS ETERNAL!

"Why this decision, on my part, is irrevocable, I need hardly explain: it is not founded alone or entirely upon your groundless repudiation of a fond and faithful wife, which in itself, taken with your reasonings on the subject, would be sufficient to justify it — but I have made it, because no reconciliation, even were I for the sake of my children to submit to it, could be permanent after an avowal

such as yours, — of your suspicions of me, — and of facts which supersede all my suspicions of yourself: — I repeat therefore, again and again, our separation is eternal!

"It may be right to say that I shall remain here with my father's widow, who little deserves the sarcastic allusions which you have made to her in your letter, — until after the funeral of my beloved parent: — that here I shall expect your reply to my claim, — my request, if you will, — as to the children. As my letter of yesterday, written in the blessed unconsciousness of your real character and disposition towards me, has acquainted you with the sudden disappearance of my maid from Oxford, I need not recur to that event, which appears to *me* unaccountable in the highest degree.—It may be only an additional incident in my history of horror.

"I cannot close this as I began it: I cannot end even the last letter I shall probably ever write to a being I have loved as I have loved you, without one prayer, that the God of Heaven may forgive all the cruelty and injus-

tice with which you have requited my affection, and that you may be made sensible in time for a due repentance of those crimes, the memory of which has destroyed the best attributes of your nature, and irrevocably sealed the misery of your wretched

"HELEN.

"I despatch this to Sadgrove, whence, I presume, should you really have left it, your letters will be forwarded."

The reader will see, that as Mortimer quitted Sadgrove on the afternoon of the 11th, having despatched his letter to Batley so as to go by that afternoon's post to London, his wife's first letter of the same day, despatched from London to Sadgrove, giving a detailed account of Miss Mitcham's disappearance, did not reach Sadgrove till the forenoon of the 12th; so that their letters crossed each other on the road; and Mrs. Mortimer, agitated and overwhelmed by her anxiety about her father, which rendered the defection of her maid a matter of almost indifference at the moment, not having

thought it necessary to write from Oxford, (her doing which, might have saved the whole of the misery which ensued,) both *her* letters arrived after her husband's departure, and, having undergone the most ingenious scrutiny at the hands of Mr. Wilkins, who rolled, twisted, and peeped into them with indefatigable curiosity, were, according to the orders which that admirable servant delighted to obey, returned to his master's solicitor in London.

With regard to the feelings which existed between poor Helen and her mother-in-law, the barbarity of Mortimer's letter, which Mrs. Batley, at Helen's desire, opened, not to speak of the insulting allusions to herself which it contained, decided the question. Helen, in the hey-day of her youth and gaiety, when all eyes were turned upon her in admiration, and all lips were eloquent in her praise, thought it either fine or right to set down Mrs. Catley as vulgar, or a bore, or something to find fault with, without exactly knowing why; but affliction softens the heart, and the voice of sympathy in grief is sweet. Teresa, in the hour of de-

spair and desolation, was all to Helen; and her devoted and unaffected sorrow for the loss of poor Batley seemed to unite the two in bonds not only of friendship but affection.

In the midst of all the misery with which they were overwhelmed, Mr. Jacob Batley, who had not been present at his brother's death, nor, indeed, paid the slightest attention to him during his illness, as we have already seen, arrived in Grosvenor Street. He was, of course, admitted, and Mrs. Batley saw him. Of Helen's arrival he probably knew nothing, and certainly cared no more.

"Well," said Jacob, "so it's all over: — poor Jack! I suppose you have killed him with kindness. Well, there's no use in grieving for what can't be recalled. Have you looked for a will? I dare say he never made one: died intestate, most likely; — so much the better for next of kin."

"My dear sir," said Mrs. Batley, "I have never given a thought to anything of the kind. The few short hours that have passed since my dear husband's death have been devoted

to feelings wholly disconnected with any such points."

"Feelings!" said Jacob; — "ay, feeling, I dare say, is a mighty fine thing; but feeling won't settle an intestate's estate; nor will it bury a dead man. What undertaker d'ye mean to employ?"

The widow looked at Jacob, utterly unable to answer, — scarcely to comprehend, — his question.

"Why, dear me!" said Jacob, "this is nothing new to *you!* Don't you recollect how nicely we buried your first; Kit Catling. What I was thinking is, that you had better have the same chap to do the needful this time as did the one before. Black jobs come fifty per cent. cheaper at our end of the town than at this; and I was saying to myself as I was coming up here, that it would save both trouble and expense to have poor Jack put in the same vault with Kit, at Islington: it will be only to get Chipp, the stonemason, to pop on an epitaph under the other, and leave a space for something about yourself

underneath, when your time comes, unless, in due time, you should like to take a third."

"Dear, Mr. Batley," said Teresa, "how you talk! I am sure I shall be too grateful to you to relieve me from the details of the sad duties to be performed. I am not aware that he expressed any particular wish as to the place of interment"—and here she burst into tears; "and I"——

"Well then,—there, that 'll do," said Jacob; "I 'll manage it all. But you had better hunt about for his will, or send down to his lawyers,—it *may* be there; because he may have had some fancy as to where he should like to be buried; and it's always as well to know how a man has disposed of his property before another man engages himself in troublesome business on his account."

Jacob had, unconsciously, hit the point. The moment Teresa was made to think it possible that if there were a will it might contain some request or instruction relative to his funeral, she acceded to his worldly suggestions, and despatched a note requesting the

presence of one of the partners in the firm of her solicitors; while Jacob, who never even asked to see Helen, set off in pursuit of his favourite undertaker.

After Helen had rallied all her energies to write her letter to Mortimer, she sank into a state of unconsciousness, and was led from the chamber of death to her own room, where, overcome by the fatigue of mind and body which she had undergone during the last two or three days, she sank into a sleep which lasted nearly four hours, and from which she awoke calm and refreshed.

As it turned out, Jacob was wrong; there *was* a will, and Batley had, with the exception of a few legacies, bequeathed everything to his wife: there were, however, no injunctions as to the funeral, and the necessary arrangements were therefore left in the hands of his eccentric brother.

In the midst of the afflictions with which she was oppressed, Helen, whose anxiety for the welfare of Miss Mitcham was really sincere, did not forget to write to her mother

immediately on her arrival in town, acquainting her with her flight, and her total inability to account for it by any circumstances that had occurred during the journey, or at their separation for the night. The morning after the death of poor Batley, Helen, however, received a hurried note from the unconscious cause of all the mischief which was in progress.

Newark, April 12, 18—.

"Dear Mrs. Mortimer,

"You must forgive me: the anger of my poor dear mother, and the vengeance of my father-in-law, I care little for, in comparison with the fear I feel of having put you to some inconvenience. Secure now from all pursuit, I halt for five minutes to apprize you of Mary Mitcham's perfect safety: by to-morrow night she will have ceased to bear that name. I have written to her mother by this post. I never shall repent of the step I have taken; she is as good as she is lovely. I have written to Mr. Mortimer three times, and also to Wilkins, to desire him to send

my moveables to the hotel to which we shall go on our return. I hope and trust Mr. Batley is better, — much better.

"We shall go to London on our return from the North. Mary sends her dutiful regards, and joins in imploring pardon for having so abruptly quitted you. I had no alternative.

"Yours most sincerely,

"FRANCIS BLOCKSFORD."

A double mystery was unravelled for the unhappy Helen by this communication. Francis *had* justified Mortimer's suspicions as to an elopement, although his suspicions as to the companion of his flight were unfounded. Helen could not help feeling mortified that Francis should have taken so indiscreet a step, and almost reproached herself with having permitted him to speak to her so much in Mary's praise. His letter produced another effect upon her heart and mind: it was the first communication she had received from him since she had become acquainted with their

relative position as regarded Mortimer: *that* knowledge had, almost unconsciously, changed the character of her feelings towards him, and invested him with an interest, the nature of which she could scarcely characterize, but which, if severely tested and thoroughly analyzed, would, more than anything in the world, have proved the nobleness of her generosity, and the intensity of her devotion to her husband.

It would pain—perhaps tire—the reader, to touch more than lightly upon the progress of the preparations for the mournful ceremony which eventually awaits us all, and which were, as we know, placed under the direction of uncle Jacob; but there are certain circumstances connected with the events of the week, to which we *must* refer.

On the Thursday arrived, without note or notice, trunks, boxes, &c. addressed — "To Mrs. Mortimer:—to be left at J. Batley's, Esq. Grosvenor Street,"— containing all her wearing apparel, jewels, trinkets, &c., — and all Mr. Francis Blocksford's "moveables," guitar

painting-boxes, &c. included, which, coming without one word of communication from anybody, seemed to decide her fate. The supposed community of interest between Francis and herself, so forcibly implied by her husband's directions, struck the wretched Helen to the heart. She could have loved Francis Blocksford more now than she had ever fancied she might have dared to love him, and have felt the deepest interest in his welfare; and this, — even *this*, would she have felt for Mortimer's sake. But no: — her fate was sealed — her destiny decreed!

In the course of Jacob's diurnal visits to Grosvenor Street, he had never expressed the slightest desire to take a last look at his brother's remains; on the contrary, he positively declined the offer, almost pressed upon him, to visit them. He discussed with perfect philosophy the goodness of the lead, the soundness of the wood, the fineness of the cloth, and the excellence of the nails, of which the coffins were composed, — for those he *had* seen, — but he could not bear the sight of

death. He did not like to think of dying: money would be of no use after death; and even if it would, he must leave *his*, behind him: — and why should he look at a corpse? — he couldn't bring it to life! — could it do any good? — no — and he would rather not.

Nevertheless, *there* he was, every day, and there he dined every day.

"Helen," said he, "I don't see why I shouldn't pick a bit. You eat nothing, — no, nor even Teresa, — neither of you: I suppose grief spoils the appetite. I never grieve; — I can always eat. Now, they always serve dinner here every day just as usual; it is quite as well I should have my bit here, as that it should be wasted, and I go and pay for my feed at 'The Horn:'" — and, accordingly, he did "pick his bit," and drink his wine; and as neither of the ladies were very communicative, or desired to make a confidence with him, he remained four days in blissful ignorance of what had occurred at Sadgrove, and endeavoured to impress upon Helen's mind his readiness to be reconciled to Mortimer by

drinking his health in a bumper, before the disconsolate sufferers sought refuge from his coarseness in flight.

But with all this, and fifty other oppressive inflictions from the same quarter, the poor mourners were compelled to bear, — indeed, more, — for, under the circumstances in which they were placed, they were necessitated to rely upon this uncouth creature for advice and direction in all the arrangements which were to take place: in the midst of which embarrassments and difficulties came to Helen the letter from Mortimer's solicitors of which we have heard before, touching the income to be allowed her according to her jointure, during her separation from her husband, in which they assured her, by his direction, that he had no intention to proceed legally in the case, (nor could he have done so under *any* circumstances, considering what had happened to himself,) and that therefore she might draw on them for the amount of her settled income quarterly.

Proud in the perfect consciousness of in-

nocence, — broken down by sorrow for the loss of her beloved parent, — mad with disappointment at the failure of all her hopes of happiness with her tyrant, and resolved to let the world judge between them when the fit season should arrive, — conceive what her feelings were, when uncle Jacob presented himself, just at the dinner-hour, in a state of grief such as she had never suspected him capable of expressing, or even, indeed, of feeling.

"Dear Mr. Batley," said Mrs. John Batley, "what has happened to excite you in this extraordinary manner?"

"Oh!" said Batley, "he is gone, — gone, — and I never shall see him more!"

And he burst into something like a flood of tears.

"Nay, dear uncle," said Helen, distressed to see the old man so agitated, "it is our duty to endeavour to reconcile ourselves to losses like these. Heaven knows how *I* suffer; but we are told to hope."

"Hope!" said Jacob, "what hope have I?— none! He will never, never come back, Helen!"

"No," said Teresa, "but perhaps we may go to him!"

"I've thought of that myself," said Jacob; "but I doubt the possibility: no chance of our meeting!"

"Why, dear uncle?" said the subdued niece.

"The world he is gone to, is a wide one," said old Batley; "but if I thought I could see him once again, I should be very ready to follow him this very night."

"My dear Mr. Batley," said Mrs. John, "what has caused this sudden desperation? It is something new to see you so very much excited."

"New!" said Jacob; "to be sure: I have lost my all, — everything on earth I cared for! — I have" ——

"Oh! calm yourself," said Helen. "I certainly am little calculated to offer advice or comfort, — but *do* reflect. The laws of Providence are just."

"Ay, ay," said Batley, "I dare say they may be: — but what are the laws of New York? Providence and New York are two

different places; there can be no doubt he is gone to the latter."

The ladies looked at each other, and made up their minds that Jacob's grief had turned his brain.

"Where, uncle?" said Helen.

"Oh!" said Jacob, "I can't tell where; but he's gone, that's all we know; and if I could but find out, I would be after him in the first ship that starts"——

"Of whom are you talking?" said Mrs. John Batley.

"Why, what should I be talking of?" exclaimed Jacob. "You all know, I suppose, — all are aware of the heavy, the ruinous loss I have sustained?"

"Too well, uncle!" said Helen, bursting into tears.

"Well then, if you are," said Jacob, "why ask about it? I have been everywhere in the City to-day, to discover where he is gone to — but no, — not a trace!"

"Of whom, uncle?" said Helen.

"Of the scoundrel who has given me the

slip," said Jacob, — "Mr. Brimmer Brassey, my infernal attorney, who has taken French leave, having carried off with him, or otherwise disposed of, all my funded property, having, for some time past, been kind enough to permit me the use and accommodation of a certain portion of my dividends."

The poor mourners, although released from the surprise which Jacob's previous conversation had excited, were by no means pleased with the truth, which, at least as far as Mrs. John Batley was implicated, appeared likely to throw her into something like a difficulty.

"What did you think I was talking of?" said Jacob, seeing that his announcement of the real fact had astonished his companions, —"of Jack?—ha, ha! — not I— he is settled, —provided for: no use going to look after *him!* — but as I am still here, and mean to stay here as long as I can, it is something to me to look after the fellow who, as it at present appears, has swindled me out of all my property. If the smash is what it looks like, I must come and live with you, Teresa, for

your seven hundred and fifty per annum is snug."

Involving, even as it did, Mr. Jacob Batley's ruin, this disclosure, and the mode in which it was made, — the tone of conversation which the narrator adopted, coupled with the perfect knowledge which both his hearers had of his unqualified and unmitigated selfishness, rendered the *denouément* almost entirely uninteresting. It seemed to them as if meanness and selfishness had met their due reward; and the only part of the history which excited either of the auditors, was that which involved the possibility of his future perpetual domestication with the widow.

True it was, however, that Mr. Brimmer Brassey, after having, by dint of wriggling and shirking and sneaking, in every possible way, contrived to secure Jacob's confidence, and by having obtained for him high and usurious interest for loans and mortgages, and charged low costs for the *legal* arrangements necessary to their *illegal* settlement, become master of all his available funds, and having lost largely

on the Turf and at the gaming-table, and having been threatened with a strike off the Rolls, not to speak of any probable ulterior proceedings, had taken his departure from this country, this voluntary destination being supposed to be, as Jacob said, America. If his exile had been much longer delayed, it might have become a matter of compulsion, and in all probability the fertile shores of Australia would have been honoured by his presence.

The astonishment which Jacob's explanation of the real source of his grief caused to the ladies was, at all events, not so great as that which the manifestation of that grief had previously excited, when they attributed it to an excess of fraternal feeling. Helen herself felt assured, that as her early suspicions of Mr. Brimmer Brassey's true character had been realized by his flight, it would eventually turn out that her apprehensions, as regarded Mortimer's property, were not altogether groundless: — but, alas! what, now, was Mortimer to *her*, or *she* to Mortimer!

The funeral of poor Batley took place on

the following Saturday; and although Jacob was as little moved by the event as if a dog had died, he attended upon the occasion, and, with the physician, occupied one mourning-coach of two,—the other, containing three equivocal personages somehow connected with the family; and the remains of the once aspiring, gifted member of society were thus conveyed to what his brother thought proper to call the "family vault" at Islington, where they were deposited, side by side, with those of his predecessor in Teresa's affections.

The procession moved from Grosvenor Street at one, by Jacob's especial direction, in order that when the ceremony had terminated, and his brother's body had been laid in its last resting-place, the mourning-coach might set him down at "The Horn" tavern in time for his dinner, as near four o'clock as possible.

CHAPTER VI.

LEAVE we the house of mourning to trace the progress of the master of Sadgrove, who, having stubbornly excluded the possibility of any communication with his wife, or any of her friends, pursued his route from Worcestershire to Southampton, where he first announced to his servants his intention of proceeding forthwith to the Continent.

Here a difficulty occurred for which he was not quite prepared. The nurse, who was exceedingly fond of the children, no sooner heard of her master's scheme of going to France, than she at once announced her determination not to budge one inch from England : — no ; — she would do anything, — everything, to serve Squire Mortimer, or anybody belonging to him ; — but as to going to France, nothing

could induce her to do it. Her own brother had been murdered by the blacks at Bongowbang, and she could not venture abroad on any consideration whatever, especially amongst the French, where, besides the cruelties of the Negroes, they lived upon frogs and toads; not to speak of the dangers of the sea. It was all in vain that Mortimer endeavoured to enlighten her upon the subject;—she was resolved—go she would not.

Now the wolf who was so exceedingly kind to the Messrs. R. in other days, was not better calculated to travel in a britscha with two "babbies," as Mr. Swing called them, than our hero. A nurse, or some female attendant who might take that brevet rank, was absolutely essential. Fortunately, all men's minds are not alike—or women's either; and it did so happen that a remarkably nice, ladylike-looking person, was actually at that moment waiting for the Havre packet, who was on her way to an English family resident at Tours, in order to undertake the management of the nursery. Mortimer's valet, who knew the

world, very soon induced the nice, ladylike-looking person, to take charge of the children on the journey, by which undertaking she secured herself, besides the gratuity which Mortimer would naturally afford her, the *agrémens* of travelling by easy stages in a remarkably comfortable English carriage, and in the society — if she had but known it — of one of the most accomplished and dangerous men, in every sense of the word, that ever existed.

When they departed, the poor old anti-gallican, who believed in her heart that the "babbies" would be eaten by the natives, even in preference to the frogs, stood on the pier and saw them go, — in no small degree resembling the hen watching the ducklings, which with patient assiduity she has hatched, taking the water: she wept, poor soul! and her heart ached even at her own timidity, which hindered her from partaking of their peril.

The reader may perhaps already guess the point to which Mortimer was hurrying. Mrs. Farnham, the sister of whom he stood in such awe, and whom he did not love, was, as we have

already heard, living at Beaugency: this nurse was going to Tours; nothing could be easier or more convenient than that she should "tend the children" until they were deposited at their aunt's, and then be forwarded to the place of her ultimate destination: — in fact, it was all in the way, and the event was one of those lucky coincidences which sometimes happen even in the "worst regulated families."

Yes, the children were to be consigned to Mrs. Farnham. Her rigid morality, her high principles, her various accomplishments, were so many guarantees for their well-doing; and as she had never seen, or personally known, Helen Mortimer, however anxious she had been in her enquiries about her, she would naturally accept a trust so reposed in her, with a high sense of the obligations it involved, and a strong feeling in favour of her ill-used brother. It was true, she had serious thoughts of returning to England, for reasons which have been before noticed; but still, even if her stay in France were but short, her reception of the infants would shield them from

the approaches of their wanton parent, and even leave her in ignorance of their real abode.

All this was done as proposed: Mrs. Farnham heard her brother's history, clasped his infants to her bosom, and promised to be a second mother to them. He was satisfied,—nay, he was grateful to his exemplary sister, who implored him to stay with her, at least till his mind had regained some portion of its composure. But no: the old, predominant feeling haunted him; she knew his faults,—his follies,—and, of course, as he fancied, despised him. The tone of her conversation did not suit him; the society of her friend he could not endure. Would that their influence had been greater, and that he could have resolved to remain where he was:—but no. Having reluctantly left his darlings,—for his feelings of paternity were strong and ardent,—he took his departure on the seventh day after his arrival, and proceeded to Paris.

It will be perhaps recollected that the St. Almes had an estate not very remote from Beaugency, where Mrs. Farnham had esta-

blished herself: this estate, from which either he derived his title, or had conferred the title upon the estate, the Count had sold. The Countess, although English born, had grown sufficiently French to disrelish a chateau :. to *her*, Paris was France: out of it, she could not exist. To a mind like hers, what were the beauties of Nature about which she affected to be enthusiastic? What attractions had a life, such as Mrs. Farnham loved to lead, for a woman *of* the world, eager, and always struggling, to be *in* the world, and who, having now lost all those personal attractions which she had so misused in early life, seemed determined to repel the approaches of age by fresh excitement and reckless gaiety?

To ensure herself the amusements of society, she had made a society of her own: — she *was* visited by persons of consideration; and as talent and genius are not exclusively aristocratic or prudish, she contrived to make her *salon* one of the most agreeable places of resort in Paris. To achieve this great object of her restless life, she had prevailed upon the

Count to sell his *terres;* and from Christmas to Christmas again, Madame St. Alme was at home, ready to receive anybody and everybody who were willing to be her guests.

To this woman, and to this house, Mortimer proceeded direct from Beaugency, his mind filled with the horrors which their first interview must produce. In all probability, — nay, almost to a certainty, — the English newspapers would have proclaimed the flight of his wife and all the rest of the affair long before he reached Paris. What course the Countess would pursue, or what course he was to pursue towards the Countess, considering who the partner of that flight actually was, he knew not; still the impulse, — infatuation, if you will, —was so strong, that he could neither remain with his sister, nor go anywhere else, except to the Countess.

The recklessness and desperation with which Mortimer had put himself beyond the reach of any intelligence connected with what he justly considered his misfortunes, but which

he also deemed Helen's infidelity, were perfectly characteristic of the man, who, in order to rid his mind of painful associations, went the length of razing to the ground one of the principal ornaments of his park. From all shocks of that kind he had by his arrangements secured himself, until he should arrive in the French capital, whither he had directed his solicitors to transmit his letters, &c.; having written a brief and incoherent note to the Countess, bidding her expect him on a particular day.

That day came, and, true to his purpose, Mortimer was at the door of her hotel within an hour of the appointed time. He had driven thither first, postponing his visit to his bankers, where his letters were awaiting him, until he should have seen the lady whose interests appeared to be so intimately connected with his own.

The reception he met with from her, astonished him: she looked cold, and even angry, but there was nothing of sympathy or agita-

tion in her manner, such as he had anticipated, considering the nature of the crime of which her ungrateful son had been guilty.

"You know all, I suppose," said Mortimer, trembling as he spoke.

"Yes, Mortimer," replied the Countess, "and nobody is to blame but your extremely liberal wife."

"Aye," said Mortimer, "that is often the world's cant; — it was said in *my* case. Have you heard from Francis?"

"Yes," replied the young gentleman's mother, whose style and tone of conversation, it must be confessed, somewhat confounded her companion. "He, of course, deprecates my anger, and urges the truism, that what is done cannot be undone; that his earthly happiness was at stake, and however much the world may blame him, he has made up his mind to all that."

"This sounds exceedingly philosophical," said Mortimer; "and does the lady carry herself with equal calmness?"

"From her I have not heard," said the

Countess; "but Frank infers, although he does not say so exactly, that Helen had been long aware of his attachment, and whenever he spoke of it to her, her discouragement was not of a nature to make him believe her sincere in her opposition."

"By Heavens!" said Mortimer, "this is the most extraordinary course of proceeding I ever met with! That he should write this sort of vindicatory account to *you*, is in itself strange enough; but that you should repeat it to *me*, with a view of calming my resentment or healing my wounded feelings, is marvellous! What possible advantage is to be derived from telling me of Helen's faults, when the result to which they have led proclaims her guilt with killing clearness?"

"Would you, then," said the Countess, "have me shut him for ever from my heart for one act of indiscretion?—a deciding one, I own—but can I quite forget that discretion has never been a *failing* of my own?"

"Good Heavens!" cried Mortimer, "how you talk! You speak as if the step he has

taken was one of ordinary occurrence, instead of destroying all chance of my earthly happiness, breaking the holiest ties, and tearing from me what might have been the dear companion of my latter days!"

"Mortimer!" exclaimed the Countess in her turn, — "what are *you* talking of? Do you mean that I should understand that you were really attached to her yourself?"

"Attached to her!" said the still wondering husband; "if I had not been attached to her, why should I have plighted my vows to her?—why——"

"Your vows!" screamed the Countess in an agony of despair: —"what! have you been endeavouring to gain *her* affections?"

"Have I not?" said Mortimer. "For days, and weeks, and months, my sole object has been to endear myself to her, — to gain her confidence, — in fact, to win her heart; — but I have failed. I always felt that I was never fully trusted, — never really loved; — and I was right. I have watched her, — seen her looks, and heard her gentle words,

when Frank was by: I have shuddered at the thoughts which the sight and hearing conjured up in my brain. I had not courage to speak,—and now the die is cast."

"But, Mortimer," said the Countess, "was Frank aware of your extraordinary infatuation?"

"I conclude he was," said Mortimer,—"and infatuation you well may call it. Having such a wife as Helen, my line of conduct should have been more strict and circumspect."

"Why, there," said the Countess, "I agree with you; and the confidence you have now thought proper to make is, considering all things, more astonishing than anything that has yet occurred. It struck me as extremely strange that you should be so greatly affected by these circumstances as to quit Sadgrove, and even England,—just, too, at a moment when your father-in-law's death was hourly expected."

"Death!" said Mortimer,—"why should he die? The story of his illness was all a fiction!"

"But that of his death is not," said the Countess: — "he has been dead these ten days."

"Dead!" said Mortimer, — "is he dead?"

"Most assuredly," said the Countess. "But I cannot in the least comprehend how or why you have remained in ignorance of a fact so important to your family."

"Are you certain?" said Mortimer.

"Certain," replied the lady: "not only has his death been announced in the English newspapers, but Frank mentions it in his letter. He had not himself reached London from his hopeful excursion, — but Helen was with her father when he died. — How long is it since you left home?"

The mystification which began now to overwhelm Mr. Mortimer, was created, it should be observed, by the extraordinary precautions he had been wise enough to take under the erroneous impression which had been made upon him. In announcing his intended visit to the Countess, he, for reasons perfectly satisfactory to himself, abstained from mentioning his

previous visit to his sister, or the removal of his children to her care. His motives for this concealment were, no doubt, equally prudent with all the rest of his conduct connected with the affair; but the effect it produced upon the Countess was such as to leave her in a perfect state of ignorance as to the real cause of his sudden emigration, and make her attribute his journey to Paris to his nervous anxiety with regard to Frank's extraordinary indiscretion in carrying off his wife's waiting-woman.

"Helen with her father when he died!" said Mortimer: — "did they separate, then? — how — what do you mean?"

As we are already aware of everything that has occurred, it is needless to prolong our "report" of the dialogue between Mortimer and his fair friend, "The light of other days." The reader can easily imagine the state of mind and feelings to which he was reduced, or rather exalted, by the explanation which the Countess gave him. He flew rather than ran to the banker's where his "despatches" were

deposited, and there found, amongst his numerous letters, that from Helen which we have before read.

His first impulse, as may be naturally anticipated, was to hurry off to England, and throw himself at Helen's feet in all the bitterness of repentance. How did he curse his rashness, — how denounce his cruel and ungenerous suspicions,—how long to make every atonement for his barbarity, not only to Helen herself, but to her dead father! and acting upon sudden impulses, had he been left to himself that night would have found him upon his road to England. Unfortunately, he had promised to return to the Countess; unfortunately that promise he fulfilled; and in the plenitude of his confidence, — or rather, in the excess of his delight at finding himself relieved from all his horrors, — he gave her Helen's letter to read.

"And you mean, Mortimer," said the Countess, when she had finished its perusal, "to submit yourself to the dominion of the woman who could write this? What! are you indeed so fallen, — so lost, that after in-

sults like those she heaps upon you, you will go, and fawn, and cringe, to regain her favour. Believe me, Mortimer, — as I said at first, — this marriage of Frank's, which has led to such extraordinary misunderstandings, was made up by her: she was privy to it, — accessory to it, — in order to inflict a wound on *me*. Why was I excluded from your house? —why was I shut out, and my boy so gladly received? Why does she hate me? — only because I have your best interests at heart, and because I cannot dissemble. If she *is* innocent, it is only because she wants courage to be what the world calls guilty."

"If so," said Mortimer, hesitatingly ——

"*If*," said the Countess, — "what *if* all that you suspect is true! — and *if* this hateful match has been contrived to blind you to the truth, while it injures us, — what then?"

"But her letter is that of wounded pride, — of conscious rectitude, — of natural indignation," said Mortimer.

"How easy it is to *write*," said the Countess: "there is no blush in ink, — no faulter-

ing in a pen. She can be bold and energetic in her letter. She asks for her children — where are they? — at Sadgrove? If they are, she will get possession of them, and then you will have no hold over her, — no means of bringing down the tone she has assumed."

"The children are with my sister," said Mortimer.

"Your sister!" exclaimed the lady; — "why, you never told me this! With your sister, whom you hate; — with your sister, who hates *me*. Why not bring them here at once?"

This question will perhaps serve as an answer to the reader, if he enquires why Mortimer did *not* inform his fair hostess of their destination. That Mortimer did not love his sister, might be true; but that he respected and esteemed her for virtues and qualities which he could not emulate, is true also: — true, moreover, was it, that the Countess hated her; and the causes of that hatred were the very qualities and virtues which excited

Mortimer's respect and esteem. It is not to be imagined, considering the terms upon which Mortimer and the Countess were, that she had not seen, or, if not seen, known the contents of Mrs. Farnham's letters, in which she implored him not to make her the associate of his young wife, — it was not, therefore, to be believed that the Countess, now that she saw an opportunity of marring the happiness which she was not destined to share, would feel less inclined to do her worst, when she found that the children of the man over whom she believed she possessed a commanding interest, had been placed under the care of her bitterest enemy.

"Now," said Mortimer, — "now the children must be restored to their mother, — their mother restored to her home."

"Yes," said the Countess, "if she will condescend to listen to your humble petition; and then the children will be brought up to hate and despise their father, who will be, of course, described to them as an infatuated madman and ——"

"Mad I *shall* be," said Mortimer, "if you talk in this manner! I *have been* mad already: I have injured my excellent Helen."

"Excellent!" said the Countess, — "oh! excellent, certainly! I have had opportunities enough of appreciating her excellence: — it was excellent in her, was it not, to gloat over the trial in which you were exposed to the public? It was excellent in her to act her part about the fishing-temple! — excellent to go and lament over the wretched Lady Hillingdon's monument, and make a show of sorrow before the parson and his children! Whenever she has had an opportunity of pointing at your faults, has she not done it? Has she not complained of being left in solitude by the neighbours, who, according to her version of the history, shun your society, and shudder at your name? And, is this the lady to whom you are to supplicate to be taken back into favour, because, by a mistake so natural, that to *me* it even now seems no mistake at all, you have misapprehended her conduct!" .

"But she *is* innocent!" said Mortimer.

"In this instance, probably," said the Countess. "Now, follow my advice: — she is evidently determined to take what she thinks a high line, and you and your barbarity are destined to become the topic of general conversation. Make your conditions. You see she refuses your money; — she separates herself from you: — let the condition be this, — that unless she lowers her tone, and admits the justice of your conduct, — which admission will keep her infinitely more circumspect hereafter,—she shall neither have possession of, nor even see her children. A mother's feelings nothing can overcome. She loves, — fondly loves those children, — they are *hers*; — a mother is always sure of *that*: — try her upon that point. Where they are they are safe;—of *that* you are sure. That you have been wrong, there can be no doubt: put yourself right with the world. If, after your first concession, she remains obdurate, and chooses to destroy at once your happiness and your reputation, punish her; and you will find that

pride and indignation will yield to maternal affection, and that, for the sake of her children, she will sink back into the subdued wife, more especially now that her vain and foolish father, who spoiled her, is in his grave."

Upon this advice, — generous, friendly, and sincere,—Mr. Mortimer was wise enough to resolve to act,—at least to a certain extent. He left Paris the day after it had been given him, and started for London, where having arrived, he proceeded direct to Grosvenor Street, resolved to make a "scene," as he called it, and effect a reconciliation off-hand; but he was baffled. The house was shut up, and the old woman who opened the door told him that Mrs. Batley had left town immediately after the funeral, and that Mrs. Mortimer had accompanied her; that she did not know where they were gone, nor when they would be back; that all the servants had been discharged; and that the house would very shortly be let or sold.

Thence, maddened with anxiety, hating, as he did, in the extremest degree Mr. Jacob

Batley, the only surviving relation of his wife, he hastened to the counting-house of that worthy personage, — or rather, to that which had once been his counting-house, — for, when he reached the place, he found it occupied by some other person in some other trade; and when he inquired after its late owner, he was told that he had retired from business, and was domesticated in his suburban villa at Walworth.

Thus beaten, Mr. Mortimer resolved upon finding out Mr. Brimmer Brassey, from whom he felt sure he should obtain some tidings of Jacob; and having no exactly defined idea of the geographical position of Walworth, he preferred ordering a hackney-coachman to drive him to Barnard's Inn, which he had never before visited, and at the door of which, looking much like the entrance to a private house, he was deposited.

He managed to find Mr. Brassey's chambers; but when he reached them, the oak was sported, and upon the panels some wag, in imitation of the little notices occasionally so ex-

hibited, of "back in half an hour,"—"return at six," or others of similar import, had chalked in large letters,—"Gone to America:—call again this day ten years."

For the solution of this mystery, Mr. Mortimer was indebted to the porter of the "aunciente societie," who, in reply to his questions, confirmed his worst suspicions, by informing him that B. B. had really bolted, and that a great number of gentlemen had been to look after him, with no better success than the last enquirer. Under these circumstances, which, for many reasons, were by no means of an agreeable nature, Walworth was Mortimer's only resource; and having procured Jacob's address from his late town place of business, thither he travelled in a similar conveyance to that in which he had visited the Inn; but here again was he foiled. A little white-haired girl, with weak eyes, a dark frock, and a pinafore, "answered the bell" which Mortimer rang; and coming from the street-door along the paved walk of the little garden in front of the house, with the gate-key in

her hand, informed the half mad wife-hunter, that Mr. Batley, "please, sir, was gone abroad."

"Abroad!"

"Yes, please, sir," said Sally, "to America, sir."

"America!" exclaimed Mortimer. "Why, everybody is gone to America."

Whereupon Sally stared, and seeing the road and footpath still thronged with human beings, opined that the gentleman was mad, and rejoiced exceedingly that she had the key still in her hand. Mortimer muttered some unintelligible words, and, resuming his place in Number 583, returned, littered-up as he was, to his hotel, completely "thrown out," and utterly uncertain as to the course he had best pursue.

His next proceeding was to his solicitors: there he found a second letter from Helen, which had been addressed to Sadgrove, in which she stated, that by his silence with regard to the children he had added insult to injury, but that her affection for her

infants induced her to humiliate herself to entreat that they might be confided to her charge. The world, which was to judge between them, would, she was sure, justify such a determination on his part equally with hers, — never again to submit herself to his dominion.

This letter, written with more acrimony than the first, occasioned, no doubt, by the imaginary neglect of her former indignant appeal, seemed at once to change the nature of Mortimer's feelings. All that the Countess had said to him on the subject, — all the bitterness with which she had contrived to charge his mind and temper, burst out, and, dashing Helen's letter upon the floor, he stamped upon it, and, clenching his fists in a paroxysm of rage, exclaimed —

"May curses light upon her! She shall never see the children more! Am I to be insulted, — degraded, — bullied? — No! If her proud spirit comes down, and she will accept her income, pay it her; but as for terms, — as for humiliating myself to *her*, —

it never shall be said that I was so mean, — so abject a wretch! I have borne much, — suffered much: — but it is over! — And these, sir," added he to the solicitor, " are my final instructions: — no letter of hers will I open — no communication with her will I endure: we are separated eternally! Let her take what legal measures she may, my children are mine, and never will I part from them. If she applies to you, let this resolution be made known to her; and although you are aware where the children are, it is my positive command that you never let *her* know the place of their residence. Her temper may be violent, — her spirit high, — but I will not be trampled upon. This evening I leave England. I shall, in the first place, return to Paris, and thence start for Italy: you will know of my movements, and let me hear what steps this woman takes, — for she is not likely to sit down quietly under what she may think her wrongs. I am determined not to be her creature. Our marriage was altogether a mistake: I mistook *her*, — she mistook *me:* — but

those who knew her character and disposition better than she ever permitted *me* to know them, have put me upon my guard. She wants to establish a grievance. I should have been free and ready to make every explanation and atonement for what has happened;—but not now. Her real temper shows itself; and when she tauntingly says, 'no power of entreaty or supplication shall induce her to return to me,'—I answer, no power or supplication shall induce me to receive her. So, sir, I repeat, you know my final decision, and have the goodness, in all that concerns me, to act upon it."

Here, then, seemed to be the termination of that connexion which, to those who really know the world, never could have promised real happiness. Tempers like those of Mortimer and Helen never could have been brought into unison, unless the most perfect confidence had been established between them. That this never was the case, we, unfortunately, know; and we also know, that the fault originally lay with Mortimer himself. Helen's heart, — her entire heart, — which she was ready

and willing to give to the man she loved, — was worth winning; but, — such is the provoking character of our story, and of the principal persons concerned in it, — his own diffidence, or rather mistrust of himself, checked the natural impulse of her candid and confiding nature.

It is now, however, useless to reason, or think, or regret, or repent; the outbreak has happened; and acted upon not less by his own tormenting feelings, than by the atrocious contrivances of others, Mortimer and his wife are parted, — perhaps eternally! —— Let us hope not—Such *ought not* to be the result.

Mortimer, firm in his decision, returned the next day to France, seeming almost to forget, —or perhaps he would have rejoiced, if he could have forgotten,— that such a place as Sadgrove existed. He returned to the Countess. With her and her miserable little husband he remained but a short time; thence he proceeded to Beaugency, and thence to Italy, where he intended to remain for some time, and whither he despatched a letter, inviting his

dear *friend* Magnus — he was blest with many —to join him.

The treacherous Countess was delighted to hear of the success which had attended her endeavours to force on the separation of Mortimer and Helen; and the encouragement and approbation with which she received the account of his past proceedings, and resolutions for the future, so completely reconciled him to the infamous injustice he had committed, that he left Paris fully convinced that he was a persecuted, ill-used, and injured man.

Helen, who had quitted London with her young mother-in-law, had become an object of public interest, and a topic of general conversation. Her particular friends were, of course, most active in canvassing the affair: Lady Mary Sanderstead shrugged up her shoulders, and said the story of Francis Blocksford and the maid was exceedingly curious, and she did not quite understand it, —but she supposed it was all "as it should be: — Lady Bembridge thought that when a young married woman disappeared from her

house exactly at the same period with a young man who was generally supposed to be very much attached to her, it had an odd appearance; and that the matter was made little better by his choosing to marry the maid afterwards, — not that she meant anything, by what she said, as applying to any particular person." Lord Harry merely shook his head, and praised the exceeding good-humour of modern husbands; and Colonel Magnus smiled contemptuously, observing that—"It did not signify much: Mortimer's loss ought not to break his heart, even if she did ride the high horse, and never came back."

Helen, when she found out — which she did in time — that Mortimer had left England, and had returned, and left it again, and had written no answer to her letter, which ought to have produced a reply, addressed a third to the solicitor, who, obeying the orders he had received, allowed her to understand that Mr. Mortimer, whatever he might feel as to her innocence with regard to *the* case in point, would not submit to the course

she had adopted; that her income was at her command, but that he declined all further communication with her; and, as a father, not only positively refused putting his children under her care, but denied her access to them.

And so was Helen left! — proclaimed to the world innocent of the charges publicly made against her by her husband — denounced by *him*, while indignantly refusing again to place herself under his tyrannical command, or accept his proffered munificence: — But what of these? Her high spirit, and the consciousness of rectitude, would buoy her up amidst the rapids, and currents, and storms of society; — yet, to lose her children, — to be deprived of those by whom, by night and by day, she had watched and prayed, — whom she had tended — nurtured from her own bosom, — for whom she had suffered a mother's pangs, and felt a mother's joy; — those, whom it would have been her pride, her happiness, her honour, to have trained in the ways of truth and goodness, — one of whom she had

already taught to lisp the word "father," and in whose countenance she saw that father's features likened,—to have these darlings torn from her,—to be exiled from her rightful home,—to be made as much an outcast as he that she had dearly loved could make her:—surely, this was enough to break the stoutest heart!

Helen, after having received the answer to her last communication with the solicitors, almost repented of the warmth and violence of language in which it had been couched. The children were all to her; but it was now too late. Her disdain of the infamous allegations against her character, disproved as they were, had engendered the hatred of her husband, and all hope of reconciliation was destroyed. The liberal members of society looked cold upon Mrs. Mortimer; her husband was pitied; the escape of the children was considered providential; and without one friend upon earth to espouse her cause, except her young mother-in-law, she quitted London,

and, in one week after her departure, was never missed from the circles of which she had once been the brightest ornament.

It is most painful to have to record the circumstances of a disunion, so trivial in point of cause, and so important in its results; but, nevertheless, two years elapsed after the separation between Mortimer and his wife, and although mutual friends—(they had but few)—had interfered, in the hope of reconciling them, her proud spirit would not bend, nor could his resentment against her be softened; because, let it be remembered, the burst of feeling displayed in her letters was only corroborative of *his* suspicions of *her* suspicions of him. Magnus joined him on the Continent, and there they remained. Jacob, who had followed Brassey to America, returned, having recovered a certain portion of his property, the volatile attorney having disgorged a considerable part of his embezzled funds. Mr. Brassey subsequently was obliged to leave even America, and whither he went was never exactly ascertained. Jacob, after

his return to England, muddled away the rest of his life at his miserable house in Walworth, where he ended his days; and having inexorably refused to make a will, which, with his own knowledge, could possibly benefit anybody upon earth, died intestate; and the wreck of his property, amounting to some forty thousand pounds, devolved upon Helen, as next of kin.

The few people who remembered the once charming Helen Batley, now and then gave themselves the trouble of wondering what had begone with her. It was altogether a curious story, and the marriage of Mr. Blocksford with the maid was a curious story; but Mr. and Mrs. Blocksford were an extremely happy couple, and the Countess St. Alme had departed (we hope) to a better world! Frank had one son, with every probability of a further increase to his family; so that our register of Births, Deaths, and Marriages has not been ill kept.

Mrs. Farnham, after a year's residence at Beaugency, rather, perhaps, under the in-

fluence of a suggestion from Mortimer, who, knowing all he did of French manners and French prejudices, preferred that his children should be "trained" in England, returned after a lengthened absence to her native country; but loving retirement, and being prepossessed in favour of the west of England, not only from its natural claims upon the admirers of calm and quiet rural scenery, but by the connexion of her constant friend and companion with Somersetshire, she selected, after a search of a few weeks, a house well adapted to her wants and wishes, at Minehead, a town which the narrator's pen has before described. Little of it is known, probably, to the generality of readers; but it is beautiful in its simplicity, and charmingly situated on the edge of the Bristol channel, which, bounded by the distant Welch hills, has, in the fresh clearness of summer, an Italian brightness, delightful to the eye of Mortimer's long-alienated sister.

In this retreat the young Francis Mor-

timer and his beautiful little sister, Rosa, grew in grace and loveliness; and never did father more anxiously feel for the happiness and advancement of his children than Mortimer, who, amidst all his dreadful passions, possessed the affections of paternity in the highest degree.—Judge, then, what was his horror at hearing, by express, at Milan, from his sister, that both his darlings had been attacked by small-pox of the most virulent nature, which was raging in the place. In these days of expeditious journeys the news,—which, being bad, proverbially travelled fast enough,—was not long in reaching him. Strange, to be sure, are the conformation and construction of the human mind! He whose proud spirit, brought in opposition to the prouder spirit of his wife, would not listen to the proposition of a reconciliation, even if *she* would have listened to it, raved with horror at hearing of the danger of those children which were hers as well as his. Not an instant did he lose: one hour was not suffered to elapse before he start-

ed for England; and as fast as horses could bring him within reach of steam-boats, or steam-boats bring him home, he came.

To describe the dread, the trepidation, the hope, the fear, which agitated the anxious father, when he found himself at the house which contained his children, would be impossible. His Britska stopped before it; —so did the pulsation of his heart.

"Are they alive? —are they safe?" cried, or rather screamed, Mortimer, as the servant opened the door.

"Both, sir, alive and safe," was the man's answer, who knew to whom he was speaking.

"Thank God!" said the grateful father, and leaped from the carriage.

A thousand things had affected this unhappy man, with which we have little to do: —Magnus had involved him seriously; Brassey had injured him much; and the miscreant Wilkins, who had, of course, excluded Crawley and his honest family, had committed all sorts of peculations and thefts at Sadgrove; — but these words, —"alive and safe,"— as re-

garded his dear children, drove from his mind the memory of all other things.

Mrs. Farnham received him with warmth and kindness, and Mortimer found relief in a flood of tears. It is a triumph to see a sinner weep; and if this Mortimer, who had permitted the best of wives, — whatever her own high spirit might have led her to do, — had only felt towards her as he ought to have felt, the widowed feeling of paternal love which he now experienced would have been spared him, and all the evils which had been accumulated on his head would have been supplanted by those blessings which never can be bestowed on a husband but by the affectionate love of a virtuous wife, and her tender cares as a devoted mother.

"My beloved sister," said Mortimer, "the children are safe!"

"Yes, Mortimer," replied Mrs. Farnham. "They have been dreadfully — dangerously ill!"

"Their unhappy mother knew nothing of it," said Mortimer; "at least, I thank God

for that! — for, oh! Emily, we have been both wrong! — and when I heard of the illness of these dear babes, I thought of *her*, — of the madness which separated us: — she loved them, as I loved them. For mercy's sake, let me see them!"

"Francis is quite recovered," said Mrs. Farnham; "but Rosa is still, although out of danger, not entirely restored — safe, remember. But I must tell you something which must, in a great degree qualify our happiness: — about four or five months since, a most respectable person, — I should almost say elegant and graceful, — but evidently in ill health, a Mrs. Miles, applied to me for the place of nursery-governess; and I was too happy to engage her. She is a widow, and, having lost a child of her own, seemed most anxious to devote herself to ours. Indeed, I never saw such kindness, — such care, — such fondness! When the children were taken ill with this fearful complaint, no power could keep her a moment from them, and night and day has she attended them with incessant watchfulness."

"How shall I ever repay her!" said Mortimer.

"Ah," said Mrs. Farnham, "I fear you will never have the power. The children are now with her,—they will not quit her; but, during her constant attendance on them, she has caught the dreadful infection, and the medical men have pronounced her recovery hopeless. In fact, she is, as I believe, at this moment in the agonies of death!"

"How dreadful!" said Mortimer. "Oh! let her live, that I may breathe my prayers of gratitude for her."

"It must be speedily then," said Mrs. Farnham; "a little time, I am afraid, will end the painful scene. Come—come!"

Mortimer followed her: his children, as it were instinctively, ran to him, when he entered the room in which they were; and although still disfigured by the effects of the dreadful disorder, were evidently convalescent: he clasped them to his heart, and covered them with kisses.

The physician, who stood near the bed in

which the nurse, (or governess, as she might be called,) was lying, placed his finger on his lip, to announce that the lamp of life was flickering in the socket, and that the spirit was almost on its way to Heaven.

Mortimer, anxious at least to proffer his grateful thanks to *her*, to whom he owed the salvation of his infants, advanced to the bed-side. He spoke. The suffering woman, rallying all her energies at the sound of his voice, raised herself in the bed, and, half stifled with agitation, muttered,—

"Thank God! I see him once again. He knows my innocence,—and I have done my duty to my children!"

"What do I hear?" said Mortimer.

"HELEN!" shrieked the sufferer:—Her head fell against his shoulder,—and she DIED!

THE END.

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